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THE EMOTIONAL WORLD OF THE INDIAN RENAISSANCE*

RAJAT K. RAY

I

The psychological world of the Indian Renaissance is a world little explored by historians. It beckons from behind public events — the religious movements, the campaigns for social reform, the activities to spread English education. The emotions of men and women flow on their own course below the processes of outward change. The public annals are not of much help to the historian in opening a window into their souls. The flow of emotions leaves its clearest imprint in literature.

Intellectual change is possible to trace through tracts, journals and serious essays. The flowing continuity of feeling is less easy to track. The historiography of the modern Indian Renaissance has followed the obvious sign-posts in concerning itself with the changes in the realm of ideas. But inner history must concern itself not merely with the intellect, but also with the emotions underlying systematic reasoning. It is the contention of this essay that while western influence brought about distinct changes in the sphere of thought, there was a more underlying continuity in the sphere of feeling.

The literatures of India, taken as a whole, reflect a set of shared emotional responses denoting a distinct psyche. That psyche had been formed out of symbols, sentiments and categories of thought which the people of the country had inherited from a tradition of great antiquity. New notions penetrated this corpus of thought and feeling as Indians were exposed to contact with the West. The intrusion of new ideas brought much emotional stress.

* I am deeply indebted to Professor Bhudev Chaudhury, Professor Mushirul Hasan, Dr. Richard Eaton and Dr. Hari Vasudevan in writing this essay.

But cultural identity was rooted in modes of feeling which persisted amidst all intellectual changes. There emerged a psyche new in some respects but nonetheless unmistakably Indian.¹

The intellectual changes that occurred in nineteenth century India are well known. They brought India closer to the world at large. The English-educated Indians adopted several Western notions that worked important changes in Indian society. In the first place, there was the notion of reason. Linked to it were the ideas of utility, progress and action. Another major notion was justice. Its initial impact was to stimulate an entire re-examination of the basis of Indian society, with a view to reforming its abuses, especially those abuses which violated the dignity of man. Its subsequent impact was to produce a movement against the domination of the Indian people by an arrogant colonial power.

All this brought India closer to the modern world. But there was an area in which links with her own past continued to be strong : the emotions which cemented inter-personal relationships within and beyond the family. Of all inter-personal relationships, that between man and woman is characterized by the widest range of emotions. And of all such emotions, the psychosexual attachment known as love is the strongest. But this most powerful of human emotions is a compound of several feelings, and the mix tends to differ from culture to culture. Psychosexual interplay between men and women in India possessed characteristics which grew in a distinct environment. Some of these characteristics were ingrained by long antiquity ; others were grafted on organically through intercourse with the West.

The Indian poetic conception of love was heavily sensual, but with a pronounced mystic tendency. A highly charged mixture of sensuality and mysticism, it ranged from the cosmic awareness of the unity of all things to the body's passions. Ghalib, in whom

1 This is not to imply that India was an organic entity with a national soul ; merely that the literate section of the Indian population, who have left a record of themselves, shared in spite of countless differences certain conditioned emotional responses which make possible psychological research (social and individual) in a specific Indian context.

I marvel at my musk-anointed wound of love :
a taper's flame
clothed with the perfumed darkness of the night
to the abstract reflection in another ghazal :
passion has veils from beauty's countenance removed,
there's nought
obstructs the vision but vision itself ¹

An exploration of this emotional world through literature might help us to discover, amidst striking changes, certain psychological continuities. These changes and continuities would serve to underline the specific Indian qualities of a universal sentiment. The emotional interplay between man and woman was reshaped as a new experience in course of the nineteenth century. At the same time woman emerged as a new, but distinctively Indian, personality.

II

Literary trends from around 1800 to 1905 reveal two successive phases of sexual morality. The earlier phase, which witnessed the decline of the old culture, was marked by a highly formalized conception of love. It lacked freshness ; was predictable ; and contained a streak of decadent realism which broke through the rigid and repetitive forms from time to time. It is difficult to set a lower limit to this period of decadence, which was succeeded by the new phase at different times in different regions. In the towns of Hindustan, the older unrefined forms of expression were in evidence as late as the 1870's. By then, however, new forms had already arisen in Bengal, which would soon spread to other regions. The process of renewal was completed in the country as a whole during the Swadeshi era. By 1905 the moral, intellectual and artistic forms that expressed the Indian Renaissance had reached as far up as the

1 M. Mujeeb, *Ghalib* (New Delhi 1977). Nos. 86 and 84 of verses translated by Mujeeb.

Punjab and as far down as Travancore. Deeper under-currents of feeling filled out the contours of these fresh forms of expression. The decline and the renewal were both strikingly apparent in the changing themes of emotional response between men and women which appeared in the poetry and the fiction of the nineteenth century.

In order to understand the nature of the renewal, we must look at the symptoms of the decline. Love between man and wife had no artistic recognition in polite society around 1800. In the witty conversation of the salon, where well-turned phrases were greeted with the appreciative 'wa ! wa !' at periodic intervals, love formed, of course, the principal topic of polished discourse. But the notion of purity as the generation of Prem Chand and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee came to understand it later on, was absent from it. Married happiness was unfashionable. Love as an expression of spiritual longing was not a theme that a poet would think of in the context of man and wife. Where man and wife were separated, as in the *Visaldev Rāso* (an older lay still current in the nineteenth century), the wife's lamentations would stress with naive candour the longing of her limbs.

For sophisticated feminine society, men looked beyond the family. The natural forum of cultured intercourse between men and women was the salon of the courtesan. One relationship, and one alone, had come to embody in the eyes of men of taste the concept of love as an all-consuming passion. It was the relationship between the beautiful and gifted courtesan and her rich, or pauperized, patron. The typical pair of lovers in a North Indian town was the nobleman and his concubine.

Such extra-marital relationships, based on payment for favours received, would sometimes reach an unexpected degree of emotional intensity. The wife, being a member of the household, is readily absorbed among the pieces of furniture. The courtesan or mistress, being outside the household, is not. She is a woman who can be wooed (it being impossible to woo a maiden of respectable family in a purdah-bound society) and sometimes even adored. One such woman was a *domni* — a singing girl of Delhi — on whose death Ghalib composed a moving elegy : 'For fear of bringing shame

upon me, you have thrown a veil of earth over yourself ; could one do more to maintain the secret dignity of love ?¹ Another was a Bengali widow in Banaras named Mallikā, who wrote poems and dedicated one of her books to her 'lord', Bharatendu Harishchandra. A leisured poet belonging to a rich Merchant family, Harishchandra was helped in his literary work by his talented mistress.²

Such creative emotional relationships were rare. But undoubtedly courtesans had come to play a crucial role in the cultural life of the North Indian towns. The structure of the respectable family, and the restriction placed on women within it had thrust upon the courtesan this pivotal position. The observation of strict purdah precluded romantic attachment between young members of the opposite sexes. Apart from women of the working classes and maid servants, who, incidentally, were also much sought after as objects of amorous dalliance.

courtesans were the only women who could be seen, and who were practised in the art of coquetry, of being sweet or bitter, cruel or charming, graceful in movement and alluring in manner. It was only for 'union' with them that the lover could pine, only they who could fulfil his desires or turn him away. They cultivated the art of conversation along with music and dancing and their salons provided the most favourable, one might say, the only opportunities for the exercise of skill in smart and spicy conversation and repartee in a mixed and uninhibited society ... So we could go a step further and say that the image of the beloved is a projection of the image of the courtesan, the woman without a family context, without attachments and obligations, who could be transformed for that reason into woman as such, into a purely aesthetic concept.³

An aesthetic concept, but not always an ethical one. The woman of the conventional ghazal had no soul of her own. In the Urdu

1 Mujeeb, *Ghalib*, p. 22

2 Madan Gopal, *Bharatendu Harishchandra* (New Delhi 1971), p. 14

3 Mujeeb, *Ghalib*, p. 14

snare'.¹ There are, of course, honourable exceptions, as Ghalib knew from his own encounter with the domni, who had loved not wisely, but only too well. He is too sensitive a poet not to respond to honour :

She who will captive take will watch and wait
And forge the glance that hearts can penetrate.
The eye of chastity has an exalted aim,
Seeking ways its passion to disclaim.³

But all too often, *sharāb* forms with the *sāqi* a sickening syndrome in the poetry of the age. Traces of it may be found even in this far from conventional poet's ghazals.

Some have less thirst, O Saqi, some can never
 drink enough ;
If you're a stormy sea of wine, I am a drowsy shore
Stretching itself, asking for more and more.^b

Indulgence in wine and women is accompanied by maudlin self-pity. Resigned despondency — the inevitable after-effect — dominates the spirit of poetry. It is also the spirit of the age. The poet of the Mughal twilight is seized by helpless dejection.

New-comers to this land of heart's desires
Be warned if you have lust for feast and song ;
Behold me, if your eyes can see and learn,
Listen, if you have ears for counsels wise —
At night it seemed a gärdner's generous hand
Had decked the floor with multitudes of flowers ;
The saqi in her splendour menace to God's own light,
The singer's voice waylaying sanity and sense ;
The saqi's swaying grace, the lute's melodious note
Heaven of delight for eyes, a paradise for ears —
And when the dawn stole o'er the hall, you'd see
No joy, no gaiety, no merriment or laughter,

1. *Ibid.* No. 103, p. 73

2 *Ibid.*, No. 117, p. 75

3 *Ibid.* No. 133. pp. 79-80

Just a lone candle, all by grief consumed,
A silent requiem for the night now dead.¹

Indulgence and emptiness are the inseparable aspects of this exhausted culture. From deep within it, the materials of a renewal are being gathered invisibly. But before the upliftment comes the nadir. The voluminous erotic poetry of the age was constricted by a set of well-worn images and metaphors, which tended to throttle any expression of genuine emotion. Its voluptuous and bacchanalian character had a deadening effect on the mind. Its artificiality, conventionality and insincerity contributed substantially to the decadence of polite society in northern India. Ghalib's rebellious disciple, Hali (1837-1914), was the first to break with this tradition. In the preface to his *Flow and Ebb of Islam*, he gave an analysis of this older erotic poetry which pitilessly exposed its defects.²

Thanks to (this) poetic art, I had to play the conventional lover for some time. In the pursuit of an imaginary beloved I wandered for years over desert and wilderness and raised such a cloud of dust from under my feet that I defiled with it even Qays³ and Farhad.⁴ Sometimes I shook a quarter of the inhabited world by my wailings. Sometimes I drowned the universe in the deluge of my eyes; made the angels deaf by the noise of my lamentations. The world screamed at the outpourings of my complaints. The sky got perforated by the rapid discharge (of the arrows) of my taunts..... Often I enjoyed martyrdom by the sword of (the beloved's) eyebrows, and often did I regain life by her kicks, so much so, that life appeared but a garment which I took off or put on whenever it pleased me When the mood for drinking wine come upon me, jar after jar was rolled away empty; and withal there was no satiety. Sometimes I pressed my forehead on the threshold of a

1 *Ibid*, p. 23. Professor Mushirul Hasan assures me that this remarkable verse is rich with political allegory. Social morals and political morals are apparently inter-linked by mutual decline.

2 Sayyid Abdu'l -Latif, *The Influence of English Literature on Urdu Literature* (London 1964), p. 53

3 Lover of Lāylā

4 Lover of Shirin

tavern, sometimes begged at the door of a wine-seller ... whenever I delivered a *ghazal*, I used the language of a rake ; whenever a *qasida*, I made the jester and the professional flatterer open their mouth wide with wonder ... From the age of twenty to that of forty I revolved, like the oil-presser's bull, round the same circle and fancied that I had travelled all over the world. When my eyes were, however, opened, I found that I was still at the same place from which I started.

Hali's criticism of the figure of the beloved in Urdu poetry is that it had become a conventional symbol which poets used *ad nauseum* to express a set number of typical and exaggerated moods. The rigid form of the *ghazal* left little scope for naturalism. A kind of sly realism was not, however, lacking in the period of the transition from the old to the new literature. Fiction, which was less rigid in form, combined with marvellous incidents a certain realism in the characterization of the lower orders of the people. The Persian and Urdu tales of the period exhibit the moral notions of an age of dissolution.

One of the earliest novels in Urdu, Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshār's *Fasānā-e-Āzād* (1880), closely resembles in style and spirit a tale in the old Persian style. In his sick and morbid conception of love, with its conventionalized physical symptoms, Sarshār reflects the typical notions of the unreformed world of upper Indian towns. The narrative is dotted with sighs, groans, tears and fainting fits. These external symptoms indicate no genuine capacity to suffer in the cause of a single love. As a historian of Urdu literature observes,¹

Sarshar's dominant interest is love. His characters have no other interest than to fall in love and talk incessantly about it. Public opinion is singularly weak in the society that he portrays, reserve, modesty, self-restraint, having little use in it. Azad, the hero, living in a constant blaze of adoration, is ever on his knees before a petticoat, and does not scruple to disguise himself as a fakir to steal a glance at one of his old flames ... The master makes love to the mistress inside

¹ Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (London 1964) pp. 330-333

the house and pays complements to the maid-servants in the vestibule.

Sarshār's maid-servants are one step below the courtesan of the couplet. Arch but none too demure, they promenade in the street, swearing at the host of admirers who shower compliments from the house-tops and the balconies. They are the basic type on which all his women are modelled.

The staple talk of his women is love, their chief preoccupation adornment. They rally one another on their beauty and talk perpetually of their love-affairs. They may be true to their love—some of them are ; others change their hearts like garments ... Sarshār's women have all a family likeness—they are coquettish and languishing. Nor has he any firm grasp of men and women in high circles. This is especially true of his women, cut off, as they are, by the impenetrable walls of the purdah. His ladies are suspiciously like his humbler females, except in their names, dress, thin veneer of politeness and culture ... Sarshār's women have no soul of seriousness. They are gay, flippant, sentimental, even theatrical—true to the tradition of the courtesan.¹

There is a world of difference between Sarshār's women and those drawn later on by Prem Chand.² The woman of the Indian Renaissance had a mind of her own. The renewal brought with it a different conception of love. For conquest it was to substitute renunciation, and for fickleness, faith. It established, thereby, its unmistakable links with the long-term impulses of Indian culture.

III

These impulses had never been wholly lost, even in the transitional age of dissolution. It was customary to read even into the most erotic Urdu poetry of the age a sufistic meaning, identifying the figure of the beloved as the symbol of God. But an external stimulus had become necessary to cast the content of Indian culture

¹ *Ibid.*

² For instance, Birjan in Prem Chand's first Urdu novel, *Jalwāī Isar* (*Varadān* in later Hindi version), 1912

into fresh forms. The stimulus came through the channels of Western influence – British law, British administration, Christian missions, English education, Western literature, the press, educational and cultural societies, reformed sects, and public movements of social and political protest. These agencies bred a new atmosphere in which Indian culture could begin to reach outwards, as well to as trace its roots back to a more refined past. Bengal, where the Western impact was earliest and deepest, showed the way. Its vernacular old literature, it should be noted, was not bound to the same extent by the set conventions that were predominant in the unreformed world of Hindustan. In fact, the peripheral vernacular societies assumed the lead in cultural innovation in the nineteenth century.

The poets and artists of the generation after the Mutiny felt their task to be one of synthesis. The results of their attempt to reconcile borrowed and inherited elements had become evident in most of the vernacular languages by the turn of the century. The urge for synthesis was especially clear in their search for the personality of woman and the nature of love. Here they tapped the deep pathos of the Indian psyche and tinged it with the new romanticism of the West.

The result of the mix may be studied through three masterpieces of modern Indian literature. The first in point of time is the Bengali verse play by Rabindranath Tagore, *Chitrāngadā* (1892). The second is the modern Punjabi epic by Bhai Vir Singh, *Rānā Surat Singh* (1905). The third is a long narrative poem in Malayalam by Vallathol Narayana Menon, *Māgdālānā Mariam* (1921). Each of these works is a study of a woman, depicting the passion of her soul. They are linked, moreover, by certain new conventions of love.

Tagore's conception of equal partnership between man and woman, which is the central theme of *Chitrāngadā*, was fostered by contact with Western culture. His poetic achievement lay in successfully assimilating this new notion to a native context. The symbiosis that he envisioned between man and woman was based on a strongly indigenous conceptualization of the nature of woman. The process by which the figure of the heroine took shape in his mind shows at work a native symbolism fostered by seasonal

changes close at hand. While travelling by train from Santiniketan to Calcutta, he was struck by the thought that the spring flowers which had bloomed everywhere would soon wilt under the sun. Summer would then arrive with plenty of fruits. Instinctively he connected the cycle of nature with the development of womanhood (the Indian term for nature, *prakriti*, implies also the essential woman). 'It suddenly struck me', wrote Tagore in the preface to his play, 'that a beautiful young woman might condemn her own beauty as her rival if she came to feel that she had enticed her lover by means of her youthful charm'.¹ Her outward beauty, he felt, was a temporary gift of spring to fulfil a biological purpose. If the woman had inner strength of character, she would give the mature fruit of her personality to her lover—a gift to sustain their union for a life-time. To express this idea Tagore took a legend from the *Mahābhārata* and turned it into a new verse play.

Chitrāngadā, princess of a wild border march which had found security in the strength of her protective arm, did not awake to her womanhood until an encounter with the wandering Arjuna filled her with shame about her lack of feminine charm. Her hands were strong to bend the bow, but she had never learnt cupid's archery. Roving alone in search of game in the forest one day, she came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves. She asked him naughtily to move aside, and then pricked him with the sharp end of her bow. 'Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.' Next morning she laid aside her man's clothing, donned a gown of purple silk and proceeded to the forest in quest of the prince, the unaccustomed dress clinging to her shrinking frame. Only vaguely could she recall afterwards what happened in the forest temple of Shiva where she met her hero. 'Shame fell on me like a thunderbolt, yet could not break me to pieces, so like a man am I. His last words as I walked home pricked my ears like red-hot needles. "I have taken the vow of celibacy. I am not fit to be thy husband." She broke her bow in two, burnt her arrows in the fire and prayed to the

1 Rabindranath Tagore, *Ravindra Rachanavali* (Calcutta B.S. 1368), Vol. 5, *Chitrāngadā*, Tagore translated this verse play into English prose as *Chitra*, from which he omitted the illuminating Bengali preface.

god of love for one brief day of perfect beauty. Her prayer was granted : not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year she obtained unsurpassed beauty. It gave her no pleasure. Arjuna, forgetting his vow, succumbed to the newly acquired beauty of her body. (The woman inside her was shamed even more deeply by this submission. 'Oh, shame upon you !' she upbraided her lover. 'What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself ?) Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk-white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity ? (Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's highest homage to woman.) Alas, that this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the light of the deathless spirit ! Yes, now indeed I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false.' Shame drove her to ask the god of love to take back the flaming beauty which had made her body her own rival : 'It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon.' Vasanta, the god of spring, asked her to be patient : a time would come when 'the heat-cloyed bloom' of her body would drop and her lover would gladly accept the fruitfull truth of her womanhood.

Arjuna, gradually tiring of a life given to pleasure in which duty had no place, asked the beautiful stranger who had come into his life to surrender to the bonds of 'name and home and parentage', only to be chided by the elusive form which refused to be identified : 'why this vain effort to catch and keep the tint of clouds, the dance of the waves, the smell of the flowers ?' But Arjuna, wanting something to clasp, something that would last longer than pleasure and would endure through suffering, began to turn elsewhere, being strangely attracted to the unknown princess of Manipur, whose courage, strength and affection were the support of her subjects. Weeping in mingled grief and hope, the disguised princess saw her warrior, day by day, searching a way through the dense cover of perfumed intoxication to emerge in the clear light of day. On the last night of the year, the veiled beauty asked the exhausted warrior, 'My Lord, has the cup been drained to the last drop ?' And as dawn approached, she threw off the veil to appear in her true form :

I am Chitra, the King's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the

temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her, you did well. My Lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman.¹

With irrepressible pride in her individuality, the princess went on to say :

I am Chitrāngadā.
 Goddess I am not, nor woman slight,
 No being to be worshipped from afar,
 Nor yet with indifference to be brushed aside.
 If you keep me by your side in danger and daring,
 Share with me thoughts anxious ; if you make me
 Companion in difficult task, comrade in weal and woe
 Then will you know my true self.²

Behind her claim to equal partnership lay the pride in her womanhood ; yet in her conception of it there was nothing alien. Undeniably the character of Chitrāngadā marked a break with the past. She was a new woman ; yet not out-landish, and certainly not a Western woman transplanted to a mythical Indian context. The Indian identity of her character is evident in her unique sense of womanhood — especially her sense of shame at Arjuna's surrender to her newly acquired charms. The perception that outer beauty had diverted him from inner truth defined her own cultural context. Within that context, however, she represented a novel type of personality, a character unprecedented in Indian literature. In her the older Indian ideal of the wife as a partner in the duties of family life (*sahadharmini*) had developed, under Western

1 Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (London 1955), *Chitra*, pp. 172-173. In translation, Tagore shortened the name Chitrāngadā to Chitrā.

2 Translated from Rabindranath Tagore. *Ravindra Rachanavali* (Calcutta B.S. 1368), Vol. 5, Chitrāngadā. The poet made an incomplete translation in *Chitra*.

influence, into the romantic concept of a comrade in perilous action.

Woman's quest to express herself found another form in *Rānā Surat Singh*, a Sikh epic written by Bhai Vir Singh, who is commonly regarded as the father of modern Punjabi literature.¹ His Sikh heroine, Rāni Rāj Kaur, shows stronger links with tradition than does Tagore's princess of Manipur. Especially strong is the ideal of fulfilment through a combination of action in the world with love of God — a basic tenet of the Sikh faith. The novelty lay in expressing this ideal through the life of a woman.

Rāni Rāj Kaur was the daughter of a Rajput hill prince who had embraced Sikhism. He gave his daughter in marriage to his guru's son, Surat Singh, who succeeded to the throne on his death. Surat Singh was a warrior chieftain of saintly character. Brave in battle, he went often to the aid of his Sikh compatriots, who were engaged at this time in a mortal struggle with the superior Muslim power. In one of these battles he fell, leaving behind a childless widow. The young queen found her world shattered at one stroke. The queen mother sought to cure her daughter by exorcism and charms, and even fabricated a letter which Surat Singh was alleged to have written in his own blood just before he died, advising her to marry a rival chieftain who had helped him in his last hour. Lost in grief though she was, she had enough sense to see that her husband would not give her advice which violated her sense of honour. The duties of state which fell on her were neglected by the grieving widow. Her Rajput blood inclined her naturally to self-immolation by fire, but her new Sikh faith enjoined that she accept God's will and suffer in silence. One day as she lay inert with grief by the side of her husband's shrine,

she felt she had stolen out of the body where it lay and started soaring upwards like a kite in the skies ... Like a bird flying in the skies she saw with clear eyes all things below — the mansion, the women's apartments, the whole palace indeed ; the forest, the pastures and the trees ; the

¹ What follows on *Rana Surat Singh* is drawn from Harbans Singh, *Bhai Vir Singh*. (New Delhi, 1972, Chapter five)

streamlet and the shrine ; gardens and orchards, servants and retainers, maids and her mother herself ... the body lay unconscious, and wide-awake she ... As she soared further heavenwards, there sprang into sight spirits in myriads floating in the region effulgent. Who could describe their beauty ? The beauty of the world below was as if soot, compared to theirs. Blithesome they all were like to the lotus in bloom.

An angel received her and she followed her upwards into subtler and more luminous spheres. They came to Gyan Khand, or the Realm of Knowledge, where 'the ground shone like crystal' and where the residents 'were without desire and of pure frame.' From Gyan Khand they flew to Suram Khand, the Realm of Aesthetic Beauty, and then to Karam Khand, the Realm of Grace. 'Beyond words and beyond limit was the splendour that here prevailed. Here death had no access ... Grace abounding rained here without cease.' They could fly no higher. The highest sphere, Sach Khand, was beyond the angel's reach, and they could only gaze at it from a distance. The angel pointed out the Realm Eternal to Rāj Kaur. Turning towards it, she saw a shore-less ocean of light, which shone with the brilliance of a thousand lightnings. Through this blinding light, she saw with her inner eye the Heavenly City in which dwelt her husband. A prayer of thankfulness rose to her lips. The prayer was answered and she saw her husband seated in front of the Throne of the Timeless. For a moment, pain of separation ceased. *She* became one with *hers*.

The vision did not last. In descent she became heavier and opening her eyes she found herself at the same spot where she had lapsed into unconsciousness. Her search for her lord continued. She climbed hills and searched the caves. It was rumoured that the Rana had once visited a fairy mansion on top of a perilous mountain. Across inaccessible ranges she followed the same route, undaunted by the huge rocks 'which barred the way and stood like defiant soldiers.' On the summit was a temple hewn in rock. Here she met a *yogini* converted to Sikhism by her husband. The holy woman gave her a sheaf of old papers containing the writings and letters of Surat Singh. Still she was not consoled

I seek not praise, nor the attainment of yoga,
I seek not salvation, nor paradise,
I fear not the Hades, I wish not to escape it,
This cycle of birth and death I dread not.
I may be assigned to leave in the nether regions
Or midway between earth and the heavens.
Or to fly in the air or to sink in the sea.
I worry not for any of these.
Indifferent to happiness, unafraid of suffering,
Unconcerned about the state in between happiness
and suffering,
Indifferent to where happiness and suffering be
mixed,
And to where they be absent altogether,
Wherever I may live and in whatsoever condition,
Never absent from my remembrance be my lord !
This is my paradise, my salvation.

Her lonely quest finally came to an end when an old man found her lying senseless before a remote mountain cave and took her to a satsang or holy congregation founded by Rānā Surat Singh. The old man was the leader of the congregation and he admitted her to the holy company as a member who fully deserved it on account of her unwavering quest for the final union. In this holy company she realized that Sach Khand could be attained even in earthly life, as her husband had, by deeds of service and acceptance of God's will. She resumed the reins of government, but participated every day in the congregation. She had truly entered the Eternal Realm and was now united for ever to her lord.

Rānā Surat Singh has been used as a text for elucidating the underlying concepts of Sikhism. Its philosophical implication is the harmony between divine and earthly love, between contemplation and action, between this world and the beyond. As Bhai Vir Singh's biographer notes, 'Allegorically, it is the story of the eternal longing of the human soul for merger with its original essence, of the matter-bound human consciousness to reach out to its divine

source.¹ The original feature of the epic, as already noted, is the poet's decision to have a woman in place of a man to act out the spirit's journey to its highest destiny. This was no doubt a decision influenced by the modernist trend under Western impact. But this very decision reinforced the indigenous, traditional character of the quest. The grieving young widow was the symbol of the pain of separation that drives man constantly to his God. The resolution of pain lies in union in spirit, the union which she finally attained at the end of her long quest for her dead husband. *Biraha* and *bhāva-sammilana*, pain of separation and union in spirit, are the twin inseparable aspects of the same experience in Indian literary tradition. Love finds its highest expression in *biraha*, its ultimate fulfilment is *bhāva-sammilana*. Only a mourning young woman would have fully embodied the pathos and the harmony that Bhai Vir Singh was striving instinctively to express. Yet there was something of the romantic heroine also in Rāni Raj Kaur. Her perilous ascent of remote mountains in search of the absolute expressed a new spirit of womanhood. Here was no salon woman sophisticated in the art of repartee. Embodying as she did the unconquerable spirit of man, she expressed the illimitable quality of the romantic personality.

The third masterpiece, Vallathol Narayan Menon's *Māgdālānā Mariam*, is based on the story of Mary Magdalen as found in the *New Testament*. Vallathol remains faithful to the version in the *New Testament* as far as outward events go. But psychologically the whole incident acquires new meaning. Vallathol is steeped in the *shringāra* (erotic) tradition of Sanskrit and Malayalam poetry. He dwells on Mary Magdalen's body in a way quite uncharacteristic of the more austere Christian mentality.

Vallathol sets the stage for the appearance of Mary Magdalen by describing the pride which ruled the house of Simon, where Christ and his disciples were being feasted by the rich man. No water was offered to wash the saviour's feet. Simon's word of welcome was soon over — 'Food is waiting'. It was to this scene of unbending pride that the repentant Magdalen, trembling in every limb, hurried late at night, while the stars looked anxiously down.

1 *Ibid*, p. 61

Wherefore stare
 And strain ye down — stars fixed in changless flight ?
 Has one among you leapt from the sky to earth ?
 Lo ! Thus it is — for see, a form as bright
 As any stars walk in these city streets.
 Else one might say — a little infant moonlight
 Cradled within the jasmine moon's embrace.¹

As Vallathol proceeds, this phantom of light begins to assume the concrete shape of a woman's body, each limb acquiring a suggestive roundness.

But who is she so radiantly fair
 That termulously near and restless heaves
 The peerless bosom scarce concealed beneath
 The snow-white robe that from her shoulder falls ?
 In dark cascades her lustrous tresses glide
 Down the proud-arching back and shapely hips,
 The moon, who every other dark dispels,
 With sacred rays this crowning darkness fondles
 As she goes her beauty emanates
 Perfumes heady as clinging-plant in bloom
 To blend with the cool and sandal-scented moon.

Vidyapati himself was seldom more explicit in describing Rādhā. Vallathol narrates Mary's success in her previous profession.

Black penury
 Is hard enough to bear ; and when the glint
 Of golden ransoms beckons constantly
 The gold of virtue yields to baser stuff.
 In truth, this maiden seemed a golden creeper
 Whom suitors' dowries decked with sultry flowers —
 Her feet caught in a drift of yellow coins.

The secret inner voice had whispered warnings against a whore's vile state, but these had been smothered by the passing of time and the tumult of lovers' praise. The hovel grew into a palace and the

1 This and the following translations are taken from Vallathol, *Mary Magdalen*, translated by Eric de Mauny (London 1952)

mightiest princes became willing slaves. She who had searched for scraps was now a queen. But one day the word reached her.

Thus langorous and lulled by luxuries
 Upon her rich and soft-as-serpent couch
 This fornicatress drowsed, until one day
 By chance a breath of happier days awoke her.
 Then sweet as honey, winged on a cool wind
 Into her ears there crept the Sacred Word,
 The Lord's Commandment, and her eyes grew wide,
 O, they were as shapely as a melody
 From Krishna-Christ's incomparable flute,
 The matchless syllables falling on her ear.

All at once the stately turrets assumed murky outlines. Behind each huge door swinging open she saw hell yawn with avid jaws. The struggle that now ensued within her heart was by no means easily decided.

The fiend himself
 Set her upon a ship of beaten gold,
 Shackled her with past delights, then thrust
 Her headlong down, into that sea of fire.
 Then from the blazing gulf dark forms arose,
 Like blackened steel their wild and senewy arms
 Outflung to drown her in a vile embrace.

In desperation she wept and turned to Christ.

Those lotus eyes that often for sport
 Had wrung the hearts of sternest warriors
 Now welled in holy flood, to purify
 Her sin-affrighted soul.

She poured out her gold to help the needy and found refuge in austere contemplation of God.

Thereafter, and many a following day,
 The lecher's knowing leer, the rake's fond glance
 cut her like flinty arrows.

Yet she was no more the helpless prostitute they knew. Thus purified, she directed her footsteps to Simon's house. As she reached his door she paused in brief hesitation.

O most fair

And comely, stand not hesitant at the gate,
But enter freely, for thy tears have washed
All the mire away that stained thy earth-bound ways.

Swiftly she sprang up the white steps, like a river flowing to the sea. Simon's face grew black. Was a strumpet, only fit to be showered with stones, coolly to violate his exalted hearth? Yet, as if held by some powerful bond, his tongue stirred not in unseemly speech. Mary Magdalen fell at the feet of Christ.

And Simon watched — the righteous one, so swift
To cry abhorrence at mere hint of wrong —
Watched while a wanton woman with her tears
Bathed the two holy feet he'd left unlaved.
Then saw how meekly with her silken tress
She dried them from the sweet flood of her tears,
And then most softly caressed them with her lips
Setting on each a yielding coral seal.
Woman, most hallowed glows they face ! To-day
Thy kiss is well-bestowed !

The act of worship that Vallathol describes is very much an act of the body. With 'lips like honeyed flowers' and 'teeth as pure as jasmine's milky gloss', she kisses his feet again and again — 'as swan a lotus does'. At the same time the prostration of Mary and her utter self-surrender also suggest a native attitude which bears a certain generic similarity to the love of Rādhā for Krishna. The parallel is probably not unconscious, for twice in course of the poem Vallathol specifically identifies Christ with Krishna.

Yet Mary Magdalen, no less than Chitrāṅgadā, is a new character in Indian literature. The poet's treatment of the character shows a combination of the older erotic style with a new moral approach. Central to the emotional development of this fallen woman is the process of redemption through repentance, which is a Christian notion. It may be argued, of course, that Christianity is as native to Vallathol's Kerala as Sikhism is to Bhai Vir Singh's Punjab. Indeed in some ways, the former's prostitute is as rooted in indigenous perception as the latter's princess. Yet a contrast with the figure of the beloved in older Urdu poetry would at once show where

P, 5929



a break has occurred. The woman's body, however prominent, is dominated by her conscience.

The erotic element is strong in both Mary Magdalen and Chitrāṅgadā. Nor is it altogether absent in Rāni Rāj Kaur, who is described as 'slim of build, willowy like an untouched sprout'. The inter-mixture of eroticism and mysticism, characteristic of Urdu *ghazals* and Rādhā-Krishna *padāvalis*, has by no means disappeared. Yet somehow the balance is changed. The contrast with the older sexual morality is sharp. The difference lies in the ethical context — in the new woman's conscience — in her intensified search for truth. Woman is now a person in her own right. She is no longer a symbol, an abstract figure of the beloved, a formula for expressing some mystic truth and a means of appealing to the erotic senses. She is neither '*parakiyā*' (a beloved belonging to some other man) nor '*svakiyā*' (a beloved belonging to oneself). She is no longer, in fact, an object belonging to any man, but — to repeat — a person in her own right. Here was a revolution in thought which by logical implication would bring a revolution in family and social structure. But, as we shall see, change in the latter sphere was slower. While the conventions of love changed dramatically in artistic expression, the realities were more persistent. These differential processes of change had far-reaching implications for psychological and social history.

IV

Vallathol's *Māgdalanā Mariam* stresses once again what any one familiar with the sculptures of Khajuraho and Konarak would know : the Hindu tradition does not perceive spirit and matter as antagonistic opposites. It is consequently ever ready to cancel any contradiction between eroticism and spiritualism. Indeed, it perceives that the ultimate reality can be known through physical forms charged with erotic beauty, because both can evoke feelings which transcend the boundaries of ordinary existence.

Such perceptions have often been expressed in a way which offends our modern taste. But we must not ignore the sincerely felt truth behind them. Not infrequently we encounter a surprising

depth or delicacy in the way an Indian artist or poet regards a physical form. Such delicacy and such depth are perhaps not without a touch of religious feeling in some cases. The feeling that God expresses Himself through earthly forms has been the source of artistic inspiration, and the ultimate experience of sensitive minds from the medieval bhakti movement to the modern Indian Renaissance. Kabir, the poet saint of the fifteenth century, exhorted in his famous Hindi song 'Bāgo na jā re na jā :

Do no go to the garden of flowers !
 O Friend ! go not there.
 In your body is the garden of flowers
 Take your seat on the thousand petals
 Of the lotus, and there gaze on the
 Infinite Beauty.¹

To the ear tuned to Kabir's song there will be something familiar in the invocation of beauty by the modern Hindi poet, Sumitra Nandan Pant, — an intangible congruence of underlying concepts perhaps :

The Form
 Whose splendour is reflected in the dawn,
 Whose ornament is the fresh-blown spring,
 Whose garland is a chain of stars
 Who wears a crown of the sun and the moon
 Whose hair is clustered in clouds and whose
 joy tears are the drops of dew
 Whose scented breath is the zephyr, mind the ocean
 Her must you bind in your arms,

O Poet

[*Vina*, p. 15.]

For both Kabir and Pant look at earthly forms and look through them to something beyond. One looks at the body and beyond it to the infinite ; the other looks at natural phenomena and beyond them to the beauty which forms their essence. As the vision of beauty

¹ *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, translated by Rabindranath Tagore (London 1962, 1st ed. 1915), No. IV, pp. 3-4.

unveils itself to the poet, he instinctively identifies it with the divine :

Slowly you are opening the door of your divine abode,
Every moment revealing your radiant form.
O mother, when shall I see you face to face,
You whose image is mirrored in the world.

[*Vina*, p. 48]

Pant sees divine beauty taking the form of mother. Considering the often intense emotional relationship between mother and son in Indian families, this is no surprise. But equally Indian mental processes allow the divine essence to take the form of spouse. Kabir's sentiment — that the body is the place of worship — is also the sentiment that a modern Bengali poetess expresses in a poem addressed to her husband :

Dearest, I know that thy body is but transitory : that the kindled life, thy shining eyes, shall be quenched by the touch of death, I know : that this thy body, the meeting-place of all beauty, in seeing which I count my life well-lived shall become but a heap of bones, I know. Yet I love thy body. Day by day afresh through it have I satisfied a woman's love and desire by serving thy feet and worshipping thee. On days of good omen I have decked thee with a flower-garland ; on days of woe I have wiped away with my *sari* end thy tears of grief. O my lord I know that thy soul is with the everlasting one, yet waking suddenly some nights I have wept in loneliness, thinking how thou didst drive away my fear, clasping me to thy breast. And so I count thy body as the chief goal of my life, as very heaven.

[Priyambada Devi, 'The Visible']¹

No more delicacy is possible in the expression of a wife's physical feeling for her husband. The delicate touch of the poetess in describing the truth of a physical feeling is undoubtedly inspired by a long-established moral and religious tradition, without which it could hardly have been possible. The love which the poetess

1 *Poems by Indian Women*, ed. Margaret Macnicol (Calcutta 1923), p. 85. Translated by Miss Whitehouse.

Priyambada focused on one form, the seer Vivekananda expressed for all forms of life :

Manifest in many forms is He before you —
Where seekst thou God ?
The man who loves all living things, truly
He is serving God.

For both felt, in their different ways, that the form is the expression of the Formless One. At every turn of poetic and artistic activity in the Indian Renaissance, we encounter this underlying concept, which is the bed-rock of Hinduism. It appears in unlikely situations, forges unexpected connections, is concealed behind obscure and groping expressions. At the root of the many flowered tree of the Indian Renaissance flows the underground stream of the bhakti tradition.

This central notion — that the form is the focus of the Formless — ensured the continuity of India's cultural traditions. That was the basic postulate from which followed the integration of divine and profane love in Indian literature. Divine and earthly love, when they reach a certain pitch, have a natural tendency to shade into each other. In Indian culture this became a doctrine, an ingrained attitude of mind. One of the hundred songs of Kabir which Tagore translated, and which reveal as nothing else does the blood-relation between these two poets of India, exhibits clearly the doctrine as well as the attitude :

A sore pain troubles me day and
night and I cannot sleep ;
I long for the meeting with my
Beloved, and my father's house
gives me pleasure no more.
The gates of the sky are opened, the
temple is revealed ;
I meet my husband and leave at His
feet the offering of my body and
my mind.¹

1 *One Hundred poems of Kabir*, No. XXXI, p. 38.

Kabir's sorrowing maid is the commonly accepted symbol of man in search of the Ultimate. Her father's house is the symbol of earthly bondage, and her husband-to-be is none other than God. The same theme runs through the voluminous Radha-Krishna poetry in medieval vernacular languages. Rādhā is the archetype of the love-lorn woman, and her lover, Krishna, is God's incarnation on earth.

The idea recurs in modern Indian poetry. Tagore's poems and songs repeatedly stress it. In the heart of every man there is a maid pining to be united with her lover.

Lord of my being, has your wish been
fulfilled in me ?

Days have passed without service and
nights without love.

Flowers have dropped on to the dust
and have not been gathered for
your acceptance.

I slept in the shadow of your garden
and forgot to water your plants :

Is the time over now my lover ? Have
we come to the end of this play ?

Then let the bell ring of departure, let the
morning come for the freshening
of love.

Let the knot of a new life be tied for us
in a new bridal bond.¹

She is the ever-parted bride, the *birahini* who leaves her home on every rain-swept night in search of her lover.² The pain of parting is the one sentiment which ties together two poets separated from each other by four centuries, and makes of each a poet of the Indian soul. Perhaps the heavy rains of Gangetic India had something to do with the strength and continuity of the sentiment, for the

1 Rabindranath Tagore, *Poems* (Calcutta 1946), p. 11. This is a partial translation, made by the poet in C. 1913-14. He made a fuller translation in 1930 and published it in the *Religion of Man* (London 1953), pp. 97-98.

2 The first line of a song by Tagore reads, '*Mama mana upabane chale abhisāre āndhāra rāte birāhīni.*'

association of *biraha* with the rainy season is as old as Kālidāsa's *Meghadutam*. The keen physical sense of parting produced by the rain clouds assumes readily the abstract form of man's yearning for God. Love, between God and man no less than between man and woman, is conceived in pain. Among the many songs of Tagore which are touched by the sorrow of an all-too-brief union, one runs as follows :

You have drunk the draught of songs
that I poured for you,
and accepted the garland of my
 woven dreams.
My heart straying in the wilderness
was ever touched by the pain that was
 your own touch.
When my days are done, my leave-taking
 hushed
in a final silence,
my voice will linger in the autumn light
and rain-laden clouds
with the message that we had met.¹

But sorrow itself is the way to a joyful union which is above the accidents of physical existence. The Vaishnava poets called it *bhāva-sammilana*. The notion is recaptured in countless poems and stories written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In one of his narrative poems Tagore tells the story of a widow who, wishing to mount the funeral pyre of her husband, said to the saint Tulsidas, 'Permit me, Master, with your blessing, to follow my husband to heaven.' 'Why such hurry, my daughter?' asked Tulsidas. 'Is not this earth also His who made heaven?' 'For heaven I do not long,' said the woman 'I want my husband.' Tulsidas smiled and said to her, 'Go back to your home, my child. Before the month is over you will find your husband.' The woman went back with glad hope. When the month was scarcely over, her neighbours came to her, asking, 'Woman have you found your husband?' The widow smiled and said, 'I have.' Eagerly they

1 Tagore, *Poems*, p. 96

said, 'where is he?' 'In my heart is my lord, one with me,' said the woman.¹ Her sense of being one with her lord reflects the ultimate experience of Indian mystics. Sorrow, being man's closest encounter with his inner being, is the final state in which he is reconciled with himself.

'Union in spirit' is, in a manner of speaking, a formula substituting the satisfaction of a real union which proves to be unattainable in the lives of countless men and women. One need not argue, like Feuerbach, that such a 'substitute satisfaction' is false. As the doctrine of *bhāva-sammilana* would stress, there is no feeling so keen and sincere as sorrow. He who has not felt it does not know himself. The physical satisfaction of a stable union would tend to lose its edge over time. The real depth of an attachment can be plumbed only by the measure of pain.

The question still remains, however, why the closely inter-related ideas of *biraha* and *bhāva-sammilana* continued to be so powerful a literary combination even in the altered conditions of modern Indian society and culture. The answer, at least partly, may be found in the severely restricted possibilities of love marriage in Indian society. The chances of love leading to lasting union being slim, the urge to sublimate loss was powerful. Parted love sought consolation in spiritual union — a substitute no doubt for physical union but all the more poignant for that reason.

The structure of the family and the quality of the relationships within it provided the objective conditions by which the possibilities of love were restricted. The legend of Rādhā and Krishna is revealing in this respect. It depicts a society in which the beloved is by definition *parakiyā* and cannot be *svakiyā*. In the background of it is a traditional family structure in which individualistic love between a married couple is not even contemplated. Husband and wife are not simply two individuals united in wedlock but members with a defined status in the family (e.g. 'elder son' and 'elder daughter-in-law'). Individualistic love is practically confined to prohibited sexual relationship. Rādhā, the all-time Indian embodiment of woman in love, is Krishna's aunt-in-law, wife of his own

1 Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected Poems and Plays of Rabindranath Tagore* (London 1955), pp. 204-205.

maternal uncle. The relationship is incestuous and can end only in parting.

The gravitation of individualistic, romantic love to prohibited relationships could not be expected to cease until the family structure altered significantly. The historical sociology of the Indian family is still in its infancy but there is enough impressionistic knowledge to suggest that widespread structural change in the family did not start until after the First World War, if even then.¹ The lineage and the extended family continued to be vital institutions until well into the twentieth century and are so even now. In thought and literature woman had emerged as a distinctive person but social institutions did not change at the same rate to accommodate the idea of woman as an individual. A woman 'belonged' to a lineage and 'belonging' was all the more emphasized by 'transfer' to another lineage through marriage. In view of the extensive prohibitions in force, a sad ending was still the most likely ending for lovers. A Brahman could not marry a Chamar, a Hindu a Muslim, a widow another man. These three are actual examples of parted love and spiritual union in early twentieth century Bengali fiction.² A happy ending, on the other hand, would normally require a mythical or historical situation. Islamic and Rajput, Sikh and Maratha, Vedic and Puranic legends were exploited for all they were worth to depict romantic love in literature. Even a cursory glance at the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Romesh Chandra Dutt, Hari Narayan

- 1 See for instance Rama Mehta, 'From Purdah to Modernity', in B. R. Nanda, *Indian Women, From Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi 1976). Mrs. Mehta's study of 25 Oswal families of Udaipur shows how little change there had been till 1947. 'In 1947 the differences between women in the age group 20 to 30 and 30 to 60 were only marginal. The younger women had been married at the average age of thirteen while the older at nine. Their educational level was also only marginally higher than that of the older age group ... Among the members of these families, in 1947, there was no girl who was a university graduate. There had been no inter-caste marriage. Purdah was observed by the younger age group as strictly as by the older ones ... The attitude of women in both groups regarding their roles was the same.' p. 119.
- 2 See Rajat K. Ray, 'Man, Woman, and the Novel: the Rise of a New Consciousness in Bengal 1858-1947.' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XVI, No. 1.



Apte, C. V. Raman Pillai and Abdul Halim Sharar would demonstrate the importance of historical legend in writing romantic fiction. Both the continuing strength of the pathetic-sublime tradition in Indian literature and the change in the direction of romanticism can thus be related to a social situation lagging behind thought process.

V

Western thought and Western material civilization had a powerful impact on the Indian mind in course of the nineteenth century. However, the West seems to have affected the brain more than the heart. Its penetration of the realm of ideas was measurably deeper than its foray in the realm of emotions. Even the latter was deep enough when India under the Crown is compared to China in late Ching. The intellectual changes that resulted from the Western impact on the Indian mind have figured prominently in studies of cultural history. In this essay we have sought to probe an area less thoroughly explored — the emotions of men and women as expressed through literature.

Two contrasting developments stand out clearly. One is the development of a romantic attitude towards woman and to the nature of the relationship between the two sexes. This aspect of the matter is set towards change and it shows the direction of Western influence. The other development is the reinforcement of certain older elements of the Indian psyche. These are the closely interwoven emotions of suffering and sublimation, which form the basis of the notion of harmony-in-pathos. Both these developments, as we have seen, derived their impetus from the fact that the realities of family life did not accord with the sharpened outlines of personality and the intensification of inner existence in the late nineteenth century.

Romanticism contributed substantially to the emergence of sharper emotional traits and was in turn stimulated by the discordance between traditional family relationships and intensified emotional drives. For such discordance made it necessary for the new appetites to find satisfaction in legend and history, in far-away places and long-past times. The fact that ideas and emotions ran ahead of objective conditions could only strengthen romanticism and prolong

its career at a time when it was being replaced in the West by naturalism, materialism and Freudianism. Yet when the West made its initial psychological impact on traditional Indian societies, the Western world - the world of Bonaparte, Byron and Beethoven - was still deeply romantic. The romanticism of nineteenth century Indian culture - and its continued hold at the beginning of the twentieth century - are thus neither of them accidents. Romanticism was deep and all embracing in the culture of the Indian Renaissance. Its impact on the conceptualization of personality is easily discernible in the three female characters analyzed in section III. Chitrāngadā, Rāni Rāj Kaur and Mary Magdalen — all three women are romantic personalities in their quest for the absolute, in their braving of peril, in their struggle and triumph.

Yet the romantic spirit of these characters is balanced by their pathos and sublimity. Romantic they are, but not alien. The absorption of the romantic element into the texture of Indian culture is organic. The cultural tradition of India was continuous and even the undoubtedly tremendous impact of the West did not break the continuity which sustained her cultural identity. The sustained impetus of certain closely inter-related feelings in the Indian literary tradition down to the modern age shows the strength of this identity. The measure of love, in that literary tradition, is sorrow. The happiest moment of union is charged with pain : for union is ever incomplete. The yearning to transcend this boundary sets all life, all universe, in motion. In that yearning lies the unity, in that motion the return to self.

We thus see how change is balanced by continuity in modern Indian culture. In many respects it was a new culture. It was also, distinctively, an Indian culture. Its novelty and its identity are both features that ought to be stressed. A new indigenous culture had emerged through the impact of the West on the inherited tradition.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN
TWENTIETH CENTURY BENGAL :
THE MYMENSINGH EXPERIENCE, 1906 - 1907.

SURANJAN DAS

Mymensingh was a densely populated district and the largest in the eastern half of the Bengal Presidency.¹ In 1906-7 the first major spate of communal violence in 20th century Bengal took place there, and thus began a process which was to strengthen the link between elite and popular communalism in that province. The outbreak has occasioned interest from historians in the light of the anti-partition agitation of 1905-11.² But it is considered here as a convenient entry point for a study of the continuity and change in the pattern of communal riots in Bengal between 1905 and 1947.³

Indications of communal strains in Mymensingh appeared in the early months of 1906. The first turmoil occurred at Iswarganj and Nandail police stations of the Sadar subdivision in late April and early May when Muslim crowds tried to 'rescue' their coreligionists who were employed by Hindus as servants and prostitutes. But the large-scale riot — known in official records as the Mymensingh disturbances of 1906-7 — properly began on 21 April at a *mela* (fair) in Jamalpur when Hindu Swadeshi volunteers attacked Muslim shops selling *belati* (foreign) products.⁴ This invited instant retaliation from Muslim shopkeepers who struck back at the volunteers with 'bamboos snatched from their stalls'. A riot then developed which spread to the northern part of the Jamalpur subdivision. The serious outbreaks

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1. Bengal District Gazetteers, Mymensingh (Calcutta, 1917) /hereafter DGM/.
 2. S. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal 1903-8* (New Delhi, 1973) pp. 444-64.
 3. I have discussed the features of continuity and change in Hindu-Muslim communal rioting between 1905 and 1947 in 'Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-4947' (Oxford Univ. D. Phil. thesis 1987).
 4. L/P & J/3081/07, India Office Library & Records /hereafter IOR/, Nathan to Chief Secretary, E. Bengal and Assam, No. 6K, July 6, 1907.

were concentrated in Dewanganj (especially Bakshiganj), Sherpur and Phulpur (particularly Tarakanda) *thanas* (police-stations) — an area seventeen to twenty-eight miles away from Jamalpur town.⁵ The last recorded incident was on the 10th May.

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A link between socio-economic grievances of a predominantly Muslim peasantry against their Hindu landlords and the growth of communalism in eastern Bengal has been the subject of much scholarly discussion.⁶ This economic dimension of Hindu-Muslim communal animosity was particularly important in Mymensingh where, as Nathan, the Commissioner of the Dacca Division recognised, landlord domination over tenants was 'most complete and unchecked'.⁷ Most of the Hindu *zamindars* were absentee landlords who considered their estates merely as sources of profit and allowed a free hand to their 'corrupt and oppressive *amlas*' (officials).⁸ Moreover, the Tenancy Act was generally, 'more honoured in the breach than in observance'.⁹ Printed receipts for rent were hardly issued; where 'strips of paper' were distributed they failed to indicate whether the amount was an instalment or a full payment of the rent. In the months preceding the 1906 riots the government received petitions from Muslim *ryots* (peasants) throughout Mymensingh protesting against 'oppression and unjust exactions' by their Hindu landlords.¹⁰ The Mymensingh Raiyats' Association¹¹ not only complained of a ten-fold increase in rent

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5. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Clarke to Commissioner, Dacca Division, May 20 1907 and Nathan to Chief Secy, E. Bengal & Assam, July 6, op. cit., Enclosure No. 9.
 6. S. Das, 'Communal Riots', op. cit., see Chapter One for a general discussion.
 7. Nathan to Chief Secy, July 6, op. cit., Beatson Bell, Director of the district's Land Records similarly commented, "nowhere in the province peasantry was so completely dominated as in Mymensingh".
 8. *Report on Administration of E. Bengal and Assam 1906-7* (Shillong, 1908) p 15, para-93; L/P & J/2415/1912, IOR Judgement of the Lords of the Judicial Commission of the Privy Council.
 9. *Final Report on the Survey and Settlement Operations in the District of Mymensingh* (Calcutta, 1920) /hereafter SRM/ pp. 131-2, para-343.
 10. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India, May 28 1907.
 11. The Association was founded in 1903. See Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement* op. cit., p. 458.

since 1793 in the district as a whole, but also opposed the manner by which rents of occupancy *ryots* in *thanas* (police stations), such as, Dewangunj had been increased through extra-judicial agreement every five or seven years (in place of the legal fifteen)¹². The Mymensingh *zamindars* also exercised greater jurisdiction over religious and caste matters than their counterparts in neighbouring districts. The *ryots* had to bring 'social, personal and domestic disputes' before them and pay 'heavy fees and fines'.¹³ An official report described the Hindu landlords as possessing "a spirit of hostility to the Mahomedan raiyats, of antagonism to their progress and prosperity, and of desire to keep them in subjection and to disregard their rights".¹⁴

Economically and socially disadvantaged, the position of the Muslims in Mymensingh was conducive to a class based articulation of economic grievances against Hindus. By 1906 the Hindu *zamindars* complained that "(Muslim) raiyats had learnt too much of their rights and do not show ... the same respect as before".¹⁵ Local Hindu newspapers of the district accused 'the illiterate low-class cultivators' of harbouring such 'wild ideas' as refusing to pay rent and declining to work on Hindu-owned lands.¹⁶ Peasants evoked 'golden age myths', demanding a return to the 'old pargana rate'.

Certain specific short-term developments added further to the distress of the poverty-stricken Muslim peasants. In 1906-7, for instance, the price of food, especially rice soared.¹⁷ This was partly a result of crop failures in 1905-1906,¹⁸ but its primary cause was the activities of some English companies which were buying up

12. Nathan to Chief Secy July 6, op. cit.

13. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Lyon, Chief Secy, E. Bengal and Assam, June 6 1906.

14. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India No. 614C, October 14 1907.

15. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., K. C. De, Registrar, Co-operative Credit Societies, to Chief Secy. E. Bengal and Assam No. 490 September 4 1907.

16. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 445.

17. *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V (Part-I) pp. 64-65, para-147.

18. *Report on Native Newspapers in Bengal* / hereafter NNR / No. 3 of 1906, p. 53, para-53.

almost the total yield of the crop to sell it later at a large profit.¹⁹ This operation benefited the Hindu landed and intermediary groups who worked as agents of the English firms; for the Muslim peasantry, most of whom were either agricultural labourers with a fixed income or sold produce such as jute to purchase food,²⁰ it meant further hardship. There were reports of starvation deaths among the peasantry and the *Hitavadi* of 25 January 1907 warned that if the government failed to check the price rise there would be a 'famine as destructive as the one prevailing in China'.²¹

Shortly before the 1906 outbreak a combined epidemic of malaria and cholera hit the district and claimed a greater number of Muslim than Hindu victims.²² Newspapers complained of inadequate health care and reported a general restlessness on this account.²³ A sharp rise in crime, especially against property, also indicated a growing discontent at the popular level.²⁴ In areas such as Nawabganj thirty to thirty-five cases of serious thefts were reported every week during this period. An official report described the situation accurately when it commented that the "Muslim peasantry required but a small incentive to break out into acts of violence against Hindus."²⁵

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The growth of communal tensions at the unorganised level was matched by similar animosities in the realm of institutional politics following the anti-partition movement. In July 1905 Lord Curzon partitioned the Bengal presidency into two provinces. One of his

19 NNR No. 6 of 1906 p. 116 para-58, No. 4 of 1907 p. 53 para-28 and pp. 53-54 para-29, No 5 of 1907 p. 69, para-25.

20. *Census 1911*. op. cit., p. 65, para-148.

21. NNR No. 20 of 1906, p. 450, paras 85 and 86; NNR No. 5 of 1907, p. 69 para-23.

22. NNR No. 6 of 1907 p. 108. This was natural as Muslims constituted the poorer sections of the society.

23. Ibid.

24. *Report on the Administration of E. Bengal and Assam*, op. cit., p. VI and p. 19, para-118. The number of cognizable offences reported direct to the police increased from 49,396 to 58,691; Also see NNR No. 6 of 1906, p. 114, para-5.

25. LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India October 14, op. cit.

objects was to strike a blow at the growing nationalist aspirations in the region.²⁶ But this measure provoked what came to be known as the *Swadeshi* movement.²⁷ Initially, the agitation involved a significant and sincere Muslim participation.²⁸ But successful British propaganda — to the effect that the new province with a Muslim majority would provide more jobs and opportunities for the Muslims — detached a large section of the upper and middle class groups of that community from the movement. At the same time Hindu revivalist trends within the *Swadeshi* provoked antagonism in the Muslim popular thinking.

Whether there was any direct causal connection between the *Swadeshi* and the outbreaks of 1906-7 remains 'controversial'.²⁹ In the case of the Iswarganj riots of 1906 Sarkar refers to an 'interesting discrepancy' between the reports of junior officers on the spot and the summarised versions sent by their superiors to Delhi or London. Risley, the Home Secretary to the Government of India, replied to the Under-Secretary of State for India that pressure by Hindu landlords to boycott foreign goods was 'first among the causes' of the riot; the Divisional Commissioner of Dacca likewise described interference in the interests of *Swadeshi* as the "final grievance which decided the *raiya*s to defy their former masters". On the other hand, the original report on the disturbances drafted by the Deputy Magistrate Debi Prosad Roy, claimed that the *Swadeshi*

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26. The Home Secretary Risley was candid: "Bengal united is a power; Bengal divided will pull in several different ways. That is one of the merits of the (partition) scheme ...", quoted in S. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement* op. cit., p. 17.
 27. The *Swadeshi* movement involved boycott of foreign goods. For details of this anti-partition movement see S. Sarkar, op. cit.; A. Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (Calcutta 1967); G. Johnson, 'Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908', in Seal, et. al., ed. *Locality, Province and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics 1870 to 1940* (Cambridge, 1973); and H. Chakravarti, 'Bengal Political Unrest 1905-18, with special reference to Terrorism' (Oxford University D. Phil. thesis 1968).
 28. Liakat Hussain, Chaznavi. Rasul, Din Mohomad, Dedar Bux, Moniruzzaman, Ismail Hussain Siraji, Abdul Husain, Abdul Gafur — to name a few who were the leading lights of the agitation at this stage. See S. Sarkar. *The Swadeshi Movement* op. cit., chapter Eight.
 29. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 450.

organisation never developed a "firm hold in this part of the country".³⁰ It is possible that Roy, himself a Hindu, was deliberately playing down the opposition to the *Swadeshi*. But his view is supported by the 'direct avowal' of the Muslim Marriage Registrar of Iswarganj, Syed Nurul Huda, who linked the disturbance not to the *Swadeshi*, but to the "eyes of Muhamedans have (ing) been opened ... to the exactions of the Hindu landlords".³¹ Similarly, Nathan pointed out that the pro-*Swadeshi* shopkeepers who were attacked at Bakshiganj and other places were also notorious usurers, a fact which in itself could have made them a target of the Muslim crowd³². It is also significant that no important contemporary Muslim pamphlet included sufferings caused by the *Swadeshi* in its list of Hindu misdeeds³³.

This discrepancy in official accounts can perhaps be explained by the fact that while officials at the provincial and national levels were interested in emphasising the divisive nature of the *Swadeshi* movement, local reports were more concerned to provide factual accounts of the incidents. On the whole, while the *Swadeshi* movement might not have been a major factor behind the riots, it did certainly increase the already existing communal tensions.

The Hindu and Muslim press also played an important role in fomenting and reflecting communal tensions. Evidently this was particularly true in the case of the educated sections of both communities. But sometimes, as LeMesurier indicated, ideas imparted to 'the original credulous readers' were disseminated among the 'illiterate population'. He reported how they became 'in transit ever more distorted and more violent'³⁴. Pamphlets and notices were also read out before large Muslim gatherings to 'incite them to action'³⁵. So it was not a mere coincidence that the most disturbed

30. L/P & J/3081/07, IOR Debendra P. Roy, Dy. Magistrate, to District Magistrate, Mymensingh, May 25, 1906.

31. Ibid.

32. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Aug. 16, see the enclosed report by Nathan.

33. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 451.

34. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct. 14, op. cit.

35. Ibid., see the judgement in the Case No. 4 of 1907.

areas were those which had the highest circulation of vernacular newspapers and pamphlets³⁶.

Hindu newspapers published exaggerated versions of clashes along with photographs of victims of mutilation and drowning.³⁷ The *Sandhya* of 30 April carried the picture of the desecrated goddess Basanti with the following remark :

Brother, what is there more to do? They have put indignity on the Mother ... You do not know them (Muslims) for what they are. When their interests are jeopardised they are ready to become demons. The stroke of this boycott (*swadeshi*) has made dogs of them.³⁸

The *Bangabasi* (11 May 1907) published photos of the plundered Gauripore *cutchery* (*zamindar's* office) and the ransacked house of the *naib* Bisweswar Roy of Ramgopalpur estate with the note : "When we saw this sight, we felt as if in Bengal the frightful *Bargi* anarchy was being reenacted ; the sinews of our hearts were as if broken by the sight."³⁹ Again, referring to the lootings at Dewanganj, the *Sandhya* (8 May 1907) wrote : "... All is about to be lost. Heard you ever of 16 females having been violated ? The bazars have been looted and inhuman murders done".⁴⁰

Another favourite theme of the Hindu vernacular press was the alleged complicity between the Muslim rioters and the British government. The *Bengalee* of 24 April 1907 reported at length to the "irresistable impression on the public mind ... that the thing (riot) had been pre-arranged, if not with official sympathy, at any rate with official connivance."⁴¹ The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 24 April 1907 noted in the same vein, "... local authorities are not only apathetic in respect of the troubles of the Hindus, but have not even the decency to conceal the secret pleasure at the misfortunes of the Hindus."

36. Ibid., para-18.

37. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.

38. NNR No. 18 of 1907. pp, 371-2, para-38.

39. NNR No. 20 of 1907, p. 424 para-70.

40. NNR No. 19 of 1907, p. 385 para-16.

41. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct. 14, op. cit.

The Muslim press equally sought to provoke anti-Hindu sentiments amongst its readers. Newspapers such as *Islam Darpan* emphasised the essential differences between the two communities and denounced Hindu atrocities.⁴² The Hindus were warned, "... the Moslems will give battle and destroy their enemies ... For one Moslem killed ... the taking of the lives of thousands upon thousands will be the retaliation."⁴³ *Nawab Saheber subichar* and other pamphlets preached 'apocalyptic' messages with the Nawab Salimulla as the "messiah ... (who) is said to have conquered Assam, Sylhet, Chittagong — and *allah* permitting, he might one day conquer the whole world."⁴⁴ Its main theme was the 'just punishment' meted out by the Nawab to the oppressive Hindu *zamindar* Atul Babu of Gangatia. Maulvi Samiruddin (the leading preacher and member of the Local Board in Iswarganj) had gone to see the Gangatia *zamindar* and seated himself in his presence. But the latter, a high caste and orthodox Hindu, insulted him and turned him out of the house. The Nawab then punished the *zamindar* by making him eat beef. Hindus petitioned the Viceroy, and the matter was referred to the Emperor and Prime Minister in London — both of whom expressed amusement at the whole issue and upheld the Nawab's judgement.⁴⁵ Another pamphlet — the *Red Pamphlet* — eulogised the Arab conquest of Sind and urged the Muslims to end all connections with Hindus. It reminded the Muslims, "You form the majority ; you are the peasants, (and) from agriculture comes all wealth". They were encouraged to develop a 'Swajati movement' which would 'send all Hindus to hell'.

A number of leaflets and notices written in the popular vernacular were also circulated among Muslims. One such notice urged : "Dewanganj Hindus, you have lived through the favour of the Musalmans. Within five days from today we shall loot the shops of Shapara Shah (and) Mahajan ... He who will be a true Musulman will not side with you."⁴⁶ A favourite topic of these leaflets was

42. Quoted in *Daily Hitavadi*, NNR No. 22 of 1907, p. 475 para-8.

43. Ibid.

44. Extract from the text is contained in Debendra Roy's report of May 25, 1906, op. cit. ; also see Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 456.

45. Ibid.

46. NNR No. 21 of 1907, p. 439 para-3.

an assurance of governmental support for attacks on Hindus and marrying of Hindu widows by *nika* (consent).⁴⁷ The contents of such provocative leaflets and notices, written in a more popular style than newspaper articles, could be readily communicated to the general mass.

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Despite all this, a Muslim outburst would have been difficult without another factor which operated outside the realm of either institutionalised politics or the local world of economic inequalities. This was the role played by the itinerant *mullas*.⁴⁸ They increasingly championed the cause of their poorer coreligionists, gaining an ever wider audience for their religio-cultural message. A common theme of their preaching was an exhortation to the Muslims to 'eke out their livelihood by plundering the Hindu *kafirs*' (non-believers / idolators) who had so long kept them down.⁴⁹ Muslims were urged to pray five times a day, refuse food from Hindus, refrain from performing customary menial offices for the idolators, stop subscriptions to *pujas* and prevent 'indiscriminate prostitution' of their women to the 'sexual desires of men of another faith'.⁵⁰ The District Magistrate Clarke's tour diary refers to the prominence of 'strange faces presenting themselves as preachers' and instructing Muslim labourers, nurses, midwives and carters not to serve the Hindus.⁵¹ The *mullas* also urged conversions of Hindus to Islam.⁵² A number of *mullas* from neighbouring districts such as Noakhali, Tippera and Chittagong had long been settled in Phulpur as school teachers and

47. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India, No. 409C. Aug. 26 1907, see the judgement in Jamalpur Mela Case; NNR No. 21 of 1907, p. 439, para-3; NNR No. 22 of 1906 (Part-II) p. 249, para-712.

48. See S. Das, 'Communal Riots', op. cit., Chapter One for the context of the rise of *mullas*.

49. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 456; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Clarke to Commissioner, Dacca Division, June 1 1906.

50. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement* op. cit., p. 445; LeMesurier to Chief Secy. June 6, op. cit.; Debendra Roy's report of May 25, op. cit.; NNR No. 12 of 1906, p. 231, para-9 and No. 22 of 1906, p. 485, para-2.

51. Home (Public) A Feb 1907, No. 265 and April 1907 No. 208, National Archives of India / hereafter NAI /; *Bandemataram* (Calcutta) May 17 & 21, June 1, 11, 28, 1907 cited in NNR No. 6 of 1907, p. 87, para-51.

52. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, May 28, op. cit., see the enclosed report on Phulpur riot by Garlick; NNR. No. 26 of 1906, p. 565, para-6.

they might also have played an important role in provoking their coreligionists.⁵³

To encourage their followers into action, the preachers sometimes proclaimed the advent of Imam Mahdi whose coming the Koran had prophesied.⁵⁴ In Phulpur one *maulvi* offered fifty rupees and five *bighas* of land for every Hindu woman raped.⁵⁵ Muslims were given to understand that the Lt. Governor of Bengal had been compelled to forge a *dusti* (friendship) with the Nawab of Dacca by which the government promised to support a Muslim rising against their Hindu oppressors.⁵⁶ In the Mogra and Brahmanberia areas of north Tippera, meetings were organised by local *mukhtears* (lawyers without formal law degrees, but with licence to practise in courts) such as Munshi Abdur Rauf to promote a Muslim 'awakening'.⁵⁷ There were similar reports of *mulla*-activity in and around Dephuliya before the riot.⁵⁸ In the Ekdala *hat* case the crown prosecutor himself ascribed the looting of Hindu shops to 'incitement' by the *Wahabis*.⁵⁹ Clarke's report reveals how *maulvis* such as Abdul Khalek, Akbar Ali Munshi, Suripaddi Munshi and Kalu Munshi directed the Muslims of Nalitbari to start a quarrel with the Hindus by demanding *hookahs* from them.⁶⁰ Shortly before the Bakshiganj incident the *mullas* were actively advocating the boycott of Hindu moneylenders,⁶¹ and in Dewangunj during the days preceding the outburst of the 6th May, the *maulvi* Abdur Rahman and others were preaching openly against the Hindus.⁶² In areas such as Malindabazar

53. Home (Poll) A July 1907, No. 15, Report by Garlick of May 22, 1907.

54. NNR No. 26 of 1906, p. 565 para-6.

55. Report by Garlick, op. cit.

56. Debendra Roy's report of May 25, op. cit.

57. Ibid ; L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, Report by Babu Mathura Mohan Deb, Secy. Tippera People's Association, para-10 ; Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 453.

58. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy. Home, India, May 31 1907.

59. Amrita Bazar Patrika (hereafter ABP) Dec. 2, 1907 ; The *wahabis* were followers of the Tariqah-i-Muhammediyah movement of the 1860s. It had a distinct anti-British political aspect which was suppressed. What, however, survived in the twentieth century rural Bengal was its Islamisation zeal directed against syncretist cults and practices within Bengali Muslim society.

60. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

the *mullas* openly encouraged local Muslims to maltreat the Hindus 'unhesitatingly'⁶³ and these preachers sometimes deliberately frustrated any possible 'concords' between the two communities.⁶⁴

Above all, with the prevailing economic situation in 1906-7, the anti-*zamindari* and anti-*mahajani* tone of their propaganda enabled the *mullas* to gain instant support from the depressed sections of their community. Partly as a result of these preachings, the Muslim peasantry began asserting their own rights against Hindu *zamindars* and in some areas even came to believe that they would not henceforth be required to pay rent to anybody.⁶⁵ Some preachers used the economic discontent of the deprived sections in their community for more immediate political ends. For example, during the Iswarganj Local Board elections of 1906 the *maulvi* Samiruddin tried to convince the Muslim peasants that improvement of their tenurial conditions depended on his electoral success.⁶⁶

If the *mullas* gained support among the Muslim mass by focusing upon the latter's economic discontent, they won over the Muslim elites by sympathising with the injustices of the Hindu assumption of superiority in matters of social status and prestige. The introduction of jute cultivation had helped the rise of a fairly prosperous section among the Muslim peasantry⁶⁷ who gradually adopted western education and rapidly developed political and social ambitions.⁶⁸ The local Hindu *zamindars*, however, continued to treat this new group as no better than 'cultivators as their fathers were'.⁶⁹ But these Muslims could not secure redress through institutional channels because, as yet, they possessed little "influence which is derived from Government service."⁷⁰

63. NNR No 20 of 1907, p. 425, para-71.

64. *Daily Hitavadi* (Cal) April 7 1907, NNR No 15 of 1907 p. 285, para-13.

65. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 466.

66. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, June 6 1906, op. cit.; Debendra Roy's report of May 25 op. cit.

67. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, June 6, op. cit.

68. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit.

69. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 455.

70. L/P & J/15.8/1906, IOR, see Lyon to Secy., Home, India, Feb. 21, 1906. In 1906-7 the Muslims in Mymensingh hardly controlled any newspaper worth its name; only 9% of the police officers were Muslims; their representation in Magistracy was insignificant.

The *mullas* now impressed upon them the necessity of consolidating their communal identity with their less fortunate coreligionists as a prerequisite for fulfilling their own socio-political aspirations, and this segment of Muslim society soon came to constitute a valuable source of support for the religious leaders.⁷¹

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The 1906 outbreak was characterised primarily by a move to deprive Hindu landlords of their Muslim servants and prostitutes. Most of these servants were *bargadars* (sharecroppers) who either worked on a *zamindar's* own estate or on the land of farmers with large holdings. The move to liberate the Muslim servants and prostitutes was jointly initiated by the local religious preacher Maulvi Samiruddin and a recent convert Dinesh Neogi at a well attended *waz* (religious meeting) in Iswarganj.⁷² Muslim servants were reminded that they committed an unpardonable sin in accepting food provided by their Hindu masters because it was cooked in the same pots where unhallowed meat was prepared, while the prostitutes were warned that by selling themselves to *kafirs* they had brought disgrace to Islam.⁷³

The first act of violence occurred when Harishchandra Sarkar, a landholder of Pubail, actively resisted Samiruddin's endeavours to take away his Muslim employees. A 300 strong crowd raided his house on the 6th May and order was restored only after police intervention.⁷⁴ Thereafter, the crowd dispersed and until the evening of the 12th they 'scoured' the area — raiding the establishments of Hindu talukdars and *zamindars* and bringing out their Muslim servants. The property of the servants was hardly touched but many prostitutes either had their property looted or were themselves carried off along with their belongings.⁷⁵ Prostitutes were kept confined and given in *nika* marriages to one of their

71. Nathan to Chief Secy, July 6, op. cit.

72. The crowd was believed to be 5,000 strong. Debendra Roy's report, op. cit.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid; L/P & J/3081/07, Clarke to Dacca Div Commissioner June 1 1906.

75. Clarke to Dacca Div Commissioner June 1, op. cit.; Debendra Roy's report of May 25, op. cit.

captors.⁷⁶ Some prostitutes surrendered voluntarily⁷⁷; others were coerced, as in the following example from Rasulpur: "...a prostitute and her daughter fled from the *hat* ... into the zamindari cutchery ... The Muhammadans followed and carried off the daughter by force. They demolished some hats and took away the daughter's property..."⁷⁸

Use of force to make servants and prostitutes leave their Hindu masters was sanctioned by religious preachers. Maulvi Samiruddin thus stated plainly: "We have been so long trying by means of entreaties to prevent the Muhammadans from serving the Hindus without effect. Let us now by force do what we have failed by entreaties."⁷⁹ The question arises as to why Muslim employees had to be coerced to desert their Hindu employers if the latter were so oppressive. There was, first, a certain ambiguity in the movement. The *mullas* were not objecting to the occupations of domestic servants and prostitutes in general. Rather, the implicit assumption was that while Muslim servants and prostitutes for Muslim landlords would be acceptable, such services under Hindu employment were symptomatic of Hindu economic domination. Of course, many Muslim workers and prostitutes were unwilling to lose their only viable means of livelihood, however degrading. But the other less fortunate sections of the community, roused by religious preachers, were anxious to strike at the most visible agent of exploitation and an obvious first step was to detach their coreligionists from those who had been the immediate source of their economic misery.

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Muslim attacks on the *cutcheries* of prominent local *zamindars* were an important feature of the Mymensingh riot.⁸⁰ Moneylenders' shops were also pillaged, their iron chests broken and bonds 'torn

76. Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner June 1, op. cit.

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Debendra Roy's report, op. cit.

80. Nathan to Chief Secy, July 6, op. cit.; L/P & J/2415/1912, IOR, see the telegram from B. K. Roy to District Magistrate, Mymensingh, April 22 1907. Among the *cutcheries* ransacked were those of the Tagore and Gauripore *zamindaries*.

into shreds'.⁸¹ An official report noted how the riot at Bakshiganj "took the form of a more or less organised loot of the Hindu money-lending shopkeepers who had been interesting themselves in the *Swadeshi* agitation".⁸² In Dewanganj and Phulpur the riot was described as a general 'plunder of the rich by the poor'.⁸³ The 1907 riot also witnessed the defilement of a number of idols and temples.⁸⁴ But such acts usually had an economic connotation. Both at Bakshiganj and Dewanganj, assaults were initially made on images built with the hated *Iswar Britti* (the tax levied for the upkeep of temples and images). As Sarkar comments, "Once started, iconoclasm of course gathered a momentum of its own" and Muslims started smashing *Kalibaris* (temples of the goddess Kali) and destroying family idols.⁸⁵

Contemporary Hindu newspapers reveal the extent to which the outbreak had 'completely shaken' the sense of security of property.⁸⁶ Hindu accounts claimed that all *zamindars* of the affected area were ruined as a result of the riot.⁸⁷ The *Sanjivani* (9 May 1907) remarked, "If the term anarchy has any meaning, then truly has Eastern Bengal become a scene of anarchy at the present moment".⁸⁸ The *Charumihir* complained that wealthy Hindus could no longer live in villages 'with safety to life and property'.⁸⁹ Many well-to-do Hindu families left for 'safer zones' and Clarke recorded how groups

81. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit.

82. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, No. 196C, June 29, 1907 see the judgement of Trial-3 of May 1907 in Tippera Sessions Court and also Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 20 1907.

83. Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 20, op. cit.; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., see Clarke to Barnville, May 7 1907 and Clarke to Nathan May 8 1907; Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 459.

84. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit, especially Encl. 9; Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 20, op. cit.; LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India Oct. 14, op. cit.; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 5 1907 and Abstract of Looting in Mymensingh, part-1.

85. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 459.

86. NNR No. 19 of 1907 (Part-II) p. 141 para-502.

87. NNR No. 31 of 1906, p. 705, para-77.

88. NNR No. 20 of 1907 p. 413 para-33.

89. NNR No. 22 of 1906, p. 485, para-2.

of Muslims collected along railway lines, laughing at the panic-stricken Hindus fleeing from Jamalpur.⁹⁰

Village markets (*hats* and *bazars*) were arenas for communal interaction. *Hats* occupied, as the Settlement Report remarked, "a place in the affections and habits of the inhabitants of East Bengal".⁹¹ Usually all male members of the family attended the *hat* and most of the buying and selling in rural areas took place in bi-weekly *hats* where cultivators from neighbouring villages gathered to sell or barter their agricultural produce for weekly supplies of oil and other essentials. For this reason *hats* became favourite targets of the crowd. *Hats* enabled the crowd to lay hands on a wide range of items; the conglomeration of people of all sorts in *hats* gave the crowd an opportunity to wreak vengeance on its rival community.

Looting of a *hat* often continued for as long as three hours.⁹² The Hindus were principally affected because most of the shops belonged to them; ⁹³ the few Muslim stalls were carefully left untouched.⁹⁴ In Tarakanda *hat* alone Hindu property worth Rs. 7,802-11-3 was looted.⁹⁵ Sometimes a particular Hindu community was the main target of attack. This was the case with the *Sahas* in Bakshiganj, all of whose twelve shops were broken into, and documents and other goods carried away.⁹⁶ Attacks on the *Sahas* can be explained by their position as a mercantile and moneylending group which occupied a crucial place in the local economy. Similar assaults on the mercantile community had already been a feature in the riots of other regions such as the Deccan.

90. NNR No. 21 of 1906 p. 486 para-5; NNR No. 20 of 1907 pp. 424-5 para-70.

91. SRM p. 10 para-36.

92. This happened during the looting of the Tarakanda *hat*. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit., para-19.

93. L/P & J/1771/07, IOR, p. 2, para-9.

94. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Tour Diary of Clarke for the month of May and Nathan to Chief Secy. May 10; L/P & J/1772/07, IOR. This was particularly true in Ghatiara and Tarakanda *hats*.

95. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India Oct. 14, op. cit., see the judgement in Case No. 6 of May 1907, Phulpur police station.

96. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Clarke to Nathan May 10 1907; Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit.

Interestingly, certain local traders such as the Marwaris who had been no less exacting than their Saha counterparts, were sometimes spared.⁹⁷ The Sahas possibly rendered themselves particularly vulnerable because, unlike the Marwaris, they had been directly involved in promoting *Swadeshi*.

There were other elements of conscious discrimination in the lootings. While petty open-air traders selling goods worth a few *annas* were left untouched,⁹⁸ flourishing shops, especially those selling *Swadeshi* items, cloth and goods for immediate consumption such as fish, sweetmeats, kerosine, groceries and tobacco, became targets of attack.⁹⁹ These lootings produced very few casualties because Hindus offered little resistance, whilst the Muslim crowd appeared to have been motivated by a desire to do violence to property rather than to people.

Hindus from the lower social strata were not, however, totally unaffected by the riot. Attacks were recorded on the huts of *dhobis* (washermen), *tantis* (weavers), *goalas* (milkmen) fishermen, carpenters, potters, cobblers and other low-caste Hindus.¹⁰⁰ The *Rajbangshis* — widely considered 'poor and harmless' — also suffered much in Dewanganj.¹⁰¹ The pattern of violence against poorer Hindus was, nevertheless, different from that practiced upon their richer

97. Clarke to Nathan, May 5, op. cit. ; Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit. ; Tour Diary of Clarke for the month of May 1907, op. cit. ; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit.. see the judgement of Case No 2 of May 1907, Dewanganj police station. They were practically untouched in Bakshiganj, although in Jamalpur and certain other areas they were targets of attack.

98. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit.

99. Ibid ; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct. 14 op. cit., see the judgement in Case No. 7 of May 1907, Phulpur police station ; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit. , LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, May 31 1907. In Dephuliya especially the rich cloth sellers suffered a great deal from lootings.

100. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct. 14, op. cit., see judgements in Case Nos. 9, 11, 21, 22 of Phulpur police station and Case Nos. 14, 16, 17 of May 1907, Sherpur police station ; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India May 28, op. cit ; Nathan to Chief Secy , July 6, op. cit. ; L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, especially reports by Wares

101. LeMesurier to Secy , Home, India, Oct. 14, op. cit , see the judgement in Case No. 9 of May 1907, Phulpur police station.

coreligionists. The main purpose of assaults on the former appears to have been a simple desire to express a hatred for the community as a whole. There was neither arson nor idol breaking, whereas the houses of Hindu notables were subjected to considerable damage.¹⁰²

Both official and non-official sources record instances of attacks on Hindu women. Rioters broke into homes and took away young widows,¹⁰³ and women hid themselves in jungles for days to escape assaults.¹⁰⁴ The honour of woman constituted the most sacrosanct feature of Hindu social ideology, and violation thereof thus implied the total destruction of a Hindu's *izzat* (honour). It is interesting that most of the women who suffered during the riot belonged to respectable or established families. Offences against them can, therefore, also be seen as a part of the general Muslim assault against the privileged Hindus.¹⁰⁵

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The Muslim crowd was encouraged by a rumour that their violence against Hindus, especially the landlords and *mahajans*, had official sanction. The rioters widely believed that all law courts had been suspended for three months to enable them to marry Hindu

102. LeMesurier Oct. 14 1907, op. cit. para-9 and judgement in case no. 15 of May 1907, Dewanganj police station.

103. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India Oct. 14, op. cit., see the enclosed judgements in Case Nos 3 & 17 of May 1907 Dewanganj police station and Masjidbari Case Trial No. 1; Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 20, op. cit; Clarke to Nathan, May 5 and May 20, op. cit.

104. Tour Diary of Clarke, op. cit; Clarke to Barnville, May 7, op. cit.

105. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit.; Note by Clarke May 21, 1907, Appendix-D. In fact, since most of the women involved were from respectable families the cases were hushed up and this explains the relatively few prosecutions for assaults on women. There were, however, some cases of attacks on women of the lower social strata. For instance, the wife and step-daughter of a cobbler in Dewanganj and members of *mali* (gardener) and *Rajbanshi* castes in Jamalpur suffered from molestations, see Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit., Encl-9; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct 14, op. cit.; Judgements in Palastola case and Case No. 20 of May 1907, Dewanganj police station; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit.. Abstract account of disturbances in the vicinity of Jamalpur.

widows and loot Hindu property.¹⁰⁶ The punishment for such acts, if any, would be a maximum of Rs. 2-8as 'for every widow violated' and five rupees for every widow married.¹⁰⁷ It was also rumoured that the British Raj would soon be substituted by the rule of the Dacca Nawab leading to a drastic reduction of rent to Rs. 3-6 per ara (about 5 bighas).¹⁰⁸ This belief became so deep-rooted that after the suppression of the riot the local officials proposed the circulation of a proclamation 'to disabuse the minds of the ignorant mob'.¹⁰⁹ Not unexpectedly, the Muslims charged with rioting pleaded innocence in the belief that they had acted under the Nawab's orders.¹¹⁰

Sometimes rumours were spread in an organised way. 'Certain Muhamadans' moved from place to place on horseback spreading with the aid of drums the message of British support for Muslim violence.¹¹¹ Notices such as the following were widely posted: "Oh! Moslem brethren, do you know that the government and Nawab Salimulla Sahib are fully our supporters? So what have we to care for? Catch lathies, drive away Hindus, blow off ... and hammer the heads of ... Hindus to dust."¹¹² The *Sandhya* (6 May 1907) referred to a notice assuring Jamalpur Muslims: "If you commit outrages on Hindu society ... government will not take any notice whatever of it. If the Hindu *salas* attempt any self-defence, government will assist you through the police."¹¹³ The Muslim

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106. NNR No 20 of 1907, p. 408, para-9; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, May 28, 1907, op. cit.; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, Oct. 14, 1907 op. cit., see the judgement to Case No 6 of May 1907, Phulpur police station and Majidbari Case Trial No 1 for July 1907; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, June 18, 1907.
 107. NNR No. 20 of 1907 (Part-II), p. 151 para-536. These comments reveal contemporary perceptions of female worth.
 108. Debendra Roy's report of May 25, op. cit.; Sarkar, op. cit., p. 458.
 109. Debendra Roy's report op. cit.
 110. L/P & J/3081/07, IOR, LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India No. 196-C June 29, 1907, see the judgement in *De vs. Karim Kaksha* in Tippera Sessions Court.
 111. L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, Encl. IV (C) containing Telegram from Secy., Comilla People's Association to Comm. Chittagong, March 28, 1907.
 112. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Nathan to Chief Secy., May 9 1907.
 113. NNR No. 19 of 1907, p. 384, para-15; Also see other examples in Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 20, op. cit.

ryots of Mymensingh were reputed to be particularly easily roused by such rumours.¹¹⁴ It 1906-7 it was all the more likely in view of the fact that the rumours encouraged the hope of a better future.

The Hindu crowd appears to have been well-organised in 1906-7. The boycott demonstrations at various *melas* were 'aggressive' and 'militant'.¹¹⁵ The procession to the Jamalpur *mela* was carefully 'marshalled' into four bands, each marching "in close cooperation with a regular plan of campaign" and violence against Muslim stallholders began only when the last band 'posted' itself as a reserve outside the *mela* and shouted *Bande Mataram*.¹¹⁶ Attempts to send volunteers to Jamalpur from outside was further evidence of coordination in the Hindu camp.¹¹⁷ Organised and armed Hindu youths wearing *pugris* (turbans) and masks were charged with rioting in Phulpur.¹¹⁸ There were also reports of deliberate Hindu provocation. For example, an one-eyed goat was dressed in English clothing and driven round as the Nawab,¹¹⁹ and temples, such as the Dayamoyee temple, were used along with *zamindari cutcheries* as bases of operation from which the police later recovered arms.¹²⁰

An element of organisation was also present amongst Muslims. Notices were read out to Muslim peasants urging them to rise up against the Hindu *babus* who looked down upon them as 'worse than dogs'; advance warning was given for any contemplated violence; mass meeting close to the houses of 'unsympathetic' people often preceded an 'action'; before a *hat* was looted, two

114. Debenendra Roy's report, op. cit.

115. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, 1907, op. cit. Also see judgements of cases delivered by Garlick, L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit.

116. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., judgement in Jamalpur Mela Case, enclosed in LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, No. 409C Aug 26, 1907.

117. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.; Tour Diary of Clarke, op. cit.

118. L/P & J/3031/07, op. cit., judgements in Case Nos. 7 & 10, of May 1907, Phulpur police station.

119. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, May 31, op. cit. This incident was reported by Maulavi S.M. Hossain.

120. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, May 16, 1907; Nathan to Chief Secy. May 9, op. cit.; Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.; judgement in Case No. 23 of May 1907 Dewanganj PS, op. cit.

or three core 'agitators' entered the *hat* and announced the Nawab's directive for looting; in Bakshiganj the rioters cut off telegraph lines to prevent police intervention.¹²¹ Sometimes the crowd confronted the police in an organised manner. On one occasion a Sub-Inspector of Police was prevented from proceeding further by a ring of demonstrators.¹²² Looters sought to ascertain the whereabouts of the police before embarking on any venture,¹²³ and the spoils were also transported to safer areas in an organised manner. At Dewanganj, horses belonging to local hospital assistants were used for this purpose,¹²⁴ while in Bakshiganj the looted items were buried underground to prevent discovery.¹²⁵

At the same time, there were many instances of relatively unorganised lootings. The Additional District Magistrate Garlick traced the start of the Tarakanda riot to some 'market day quarrel' where the crowd had no 'settled plan of campaign'.¹²⁶ There was hardly any burning of shops and many shopkeepers were spared on payments of 'handsome bribes'.¹²⁷ In Melanganj, too, the looters were motivated more by individual religious beliefs than any organised objective.¹²⁸

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The government and police were criticised for mishandling the situation in 1906-7. Many contemporaries ascribed the 'Muslim uprising' to official instigation and connivance. Even English

121. Nathan to LeMesurier, May 9, op. cit., see the enclosed pamphlet *Alla Ho Akbar*; LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India June 6, 1906, op. cit.; Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 8, op. cit., especially the Abstract; Garlick's report, May 7, op. cit.

122. Tour diary of Clarke, op. cit.

123. Nathan to Chief Secy, July 6, op. cit.; Garlick's report, op. cit.

124. Tour diary of Clarke, op. cit.; Clarke to Dacca Div. Commissioner May 8, op. cit., especially the Abstract.

125. Tour diary of Clarke, op. cit.

126. LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India May 31, 1907, op. cit.

127. LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India, May 18, 1907, op. cit.; L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Garlick to Nathan, May 10, 1907.

128. Judgement in Palashtola case and Case No. 10 of May 1907, Dewanganj PS, op. cit.

observers speculated on the extent to which the local government's divisive policy had contributed to the communal discord. Sir Henry Cotton, for example, criticised the transfer of funds collected from fines levied on Hindu students of Kishoreganj to a Muslim institution, the Anjuman-i-Islamia.¹²⁹ Some pro-government newspapers also condemned the "open official connection with the Jamalpur outrage" as 'horrible and revolting'.¹³⁰

The Hindu press went a step further. It considered Muslim ill-feeling against Hindus as a 'fiction' and attributed the disturbances to official interference in pursuit of a policy of 'divide and rule'.¹³¹ Hindu newspapers reported how the pro-Muslim declarations of Lt. Governor Fuller were widely interpreted by lower level officials as the government's open espousal of the Muslim cause, in an attempt to counter the growing popularity of the *Swadeshi*.¹³² Official records do provide some evidence supporting such 'nationalist charges'. The Subdivisional Officer of Mogra admitted to the District Magistrate that sympathies of the Sub-Inspector Fazlur Rahman 'were rather too obviously with his coreligionists' (i.e., Muslims).¹³³ There is also the testimony of the Dacca Divisional Commissioner that if the police 'had been better utilised, much might have been done to prevent the disturbance'.¹³⁴ The local police adopted no 'precautionary measures' despite ample warnings of impending troubles.¹³⁵

129. L/P & J/1859/06, IOR.

130. See for example the *Indian Empire*, May 7, 1906, NNR No. 19 of 1907 (Part-II) p. 142, para-505, para-44.

131. NNR No. 10 of 1906, pp. 195-6, para-44 ; NNR No. 21 of 1907, p. 449, para-42.

132. NNR No. 12 of 1906 p. 241 para-42 ; NNR No. 20 of 1906 (Part-II) p. 223 para-614.

133. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., pp. 451-2.

134. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit.

135. L/P & J/1772/07, IOR. Even the circulation of inflammatory Muslim tracts in different parts of the district was not effectively prevented. The SDO of Brahmanbaria commented : "It seems strange that disturbances of such proportions should be allowed to continue for days together", perhaps pointing to the ineptitude of the police, see Extract from his tour diary for the month of March 1907.

The police were also discriminatory in their actions once the violence began. They were exceptionally swift in disarming Hindu volunteers inside the Dayamoyee temple, yet Muslim rioters were either shielded or awarded light sentences.¹³⁶ The *cutcheries* of Hindu zamindars were searched without warrants,¹³⁷ and Hindus in many cases denied the right of defence.¹³⁸ The government also discriminated between communal and secular Muslims. While it was remarkably lenient towards personalities such as Ibrahim Khan, the writer of the anti-Hindu *Red Pamphlet*, no effort was spared to keep nationalist Muslims such as Liakat Hussain under check.¹³⁹

There was a marked contrast in the composition of the Hindu and Muslim crowds.¹⁴⁰ The government broadly characterised the Muslim crowd as the 'budmashes', a pejorative term used to describe a broad section of the subordinate social group, implying that they were undesirable characters.¹⁴¹ Closer examination of this category, however, reveals that most 'budmashes' were young men 'who ordinarily live(d) by honest labour' for Hindu landlords.¹⁴² The

136. NNR No. 22 of 1906, p. 249, para-714 and No. 30 of 1906, p. 670, para-24.

137. The *Bangabasi* (Cal) May 11, 1907, NNR No. 17 of 1907, p. 337, para-12; The *Daily Hitavadi* (Cal) April 30, 1907 wrote: "Why did not the police touch a hair of the Muslims who destroyed the image of Durga at Jamalpur? Why did the Subdivisional Officer think that his duty with these rowdies was ended when he had asked them to surrender their lathies?" NNR No. 18 of 1907, pp. 366-7, paras-21-22; Also see NNR No. 20 of 1907, p. 410, para-17.

138. NNR No. 22 of 1906, p. 249, para-714. For instance, one Ram Sankar Chakrabarti was refused permission to engage either a government or private pleader; also see the question raised by Sir Henry Cotton in the British Parliament, L/P & J/1859/06, IOR.

139. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., pages 448 & 452.

140. Uptil June 17, 1907 four hundred were accused of rioting, L/P & J/3081/07, Parliamentary Question. Answer to Question 19 of June 17, 1907 by Mr. Rees.

141. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., Nathan to Chief Secy., May 6 1907 and Ryland to Nathan May 7, 1907.

142. Case No. 7 of May 1907, Phulpur police station op. cit., NNR No. 10 of 1906, pp. 195-6, para-44.

Sanjivani (6 December 1906) identified the 'illiterate' cultivators as being mainly responsible for terrorising the 'respectable (i.e., Hindu) citizen'.¹⁴³ The *Charumihir* (16 May 1906) noted how the lower-class Muslims had made British rule inoperative in some places of Mymensingh.¹⁴⁴ The maximum distance from which looters usually came was three miles from the trouble spot.¹⁴⁵ Many of them personally knew the shopkeepers they were looting; in Phulpur the crowd even included the servants employed by the shops looted. At Jamalpur the *Sandars* and *Chatkis* — the itinerant vendors — were particularly active in fighting the *Swadeshi* volunteers.¹⁴⁶ Municipal *peons* and umbrella repairers were also convicted on rioting charges.¹⁴⁷ Official sources noted how on some occasions during the riots the local Muslim crowd was swelled by an influx from outlying hamlets. This must have happened once rumours about the original outbreak gained in circulation.

The Muslim crowd occasionally contained people with convictions for criminal offences such as Miajan Peada in Melonda and Kalimuddi in Phulpur.¹⁴⁸ One of the Muslims accused of looting had already served a six month sentence on criminal charges.¹⁴⁹ Boat-looting cases in Mogra were allegedly committed by 'bad characters' from the *bil*-villages (villages in swamp lands).¹⁵⁰ In addition, almost every *thana* (police station) in the district reportedly contained families making fireworks and bombs¹⁵¹, and this section probably participated in the riots.

143. NNR No. 50 of 1906, p. 1105, para-3.

144. NNR No. 21 of 1906, pp. 468-9, para-38.

145. Case No. 7, Phulpur PS, op. cit.

146. Judgement in Jamalpur Mela Case, op. cit.; Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit., para-2.

147. L/P & J/3081/07, IOR, Sequel to Jamalpur Mela Case, S.M. De vs. Gendu Mea and others.

148. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., see the Abstract of disturbances in the vicinity of Jamalpur town; judgement of Case No. 7 of Phulpur PS, op. cit.

149. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., judgement in Trial No. 3 of May 1907, by the Tripura Sessions Judge enclosed in LeMesurier to Secy, Home, India, June 29, 1907.

150. L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, p. 4, para-8.

151. DGM p. 79.

The Hindu activists in 1907 consisted mainly of the 'less permanent residents of the town' such as *zamindari* servants, pleaders, doctors, *barkandazes* (armed retainers) and the young students — what the government called the 'usual Swadeshi crowd'.¹⁵² *Lathials* (armed retainers who mainly used bamboo sticks as weapons) were present in Hindu processions at Jamalpur and Dephuliya.¹⁵³ Sometimes Hindus of 'the lowest class', the *Hadis*, were active.¹⁵⁴ Both Phulpur and Tarakanda recorded instances when the low-caste Hindus joined the Muslims in looting the shops of their coreligionists.¹⁵⁵ Such intermingling of the Hindu and Muslim crowd was not unnatural at a moment of breakdown of law and order.

References were also made to the participation of upcountrymen in the lootings. Mymensingh had the highest number of immigrants in East Bengal, followed by Dacca, Tippera and Backergunj.¹⁵⁶ They came mostly from Bihar, Orissa and the United Provinces and were employed as *coolies*, domestic servants, coachmen, sweepers, *palki-bearers* (carriers of palanquins) and other menial workers.¹⁵⁷ Unfortunately, no detailed break-down exists of the communal identities of these immigrants. It was believed that they were 'chiefly Hindus' and that the number of Muslim immigrants was 'very small'.¹⁵⁸

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The initiative for mobilising the underprivileged sections among the Muslims in 1906-7 came from the local *mullas* and the Nawab of

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152. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India May 16, op. cit.; L/P & J/2415/1912, IOR, judgement of the Lords of Judicial Committee of Privy Council on the Consolidated Appeals of Clarke, Roy Chaudhuri and Smt Chaudhurani delivered on June 18, 1912; L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, Wares to Lees, March 27, 1907, Encl-III; Jamalpur Mela Case, op. cit.; Clarke's tour Diary, op. cit.
 153. LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India May 16, op. cit., see the enclosed Report by Garlick; Clarke's Tour Diary, op. cit.
 154. L/P & J/3081/07, op. cit., see the judgement in Emperor vs. Sairatulla Master and two others, Case No. 324 (4) of 1907, enclosed in LeMesurier to Secy., Home, India, No. 413C. Sept. 5, 1907.
 155. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.; LeMesurier, to Secy. Home, India, May 28, op. cit.
 156. *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. V, (Part-I) p. 186.
 157. *Ibid.*, pp. 180-1, para-423; DGM pp. 86-7; SRM p 7, para-21.
 158. *Census*, 1911, op. cit., pp. 180-1 & 186.

Dacca, both of whom were interested in securing popular Muslim support for the partition scheme.¹⁵⁹ The Hindu leadership was drawn from members of the propertied and educated classes such as zamindari officials, *tahsildars* (revenue officials) lawyers, teachers and farmers of *hats*.¹⁶⁰ The local officials regretted that the very section which usually helped to maintain law and order had taken the initiative in organising the violence.¹⁶¹ Among those convicted as 'ring leaders' in 1907 were the superintendents and *naibs* of Gauripore, Ramgopalpur and Natore estates.¹⁶² In Mogra the farmer of the *hat*—Nanda Kumar Sarkar—himself led the procession that started the disturbance.¹⁶³

One feature common to both Hindu and Muslim leaders was their aversion for violence beyond a certain point. The elites hoped that mass mobilisation would strengthen their hands in bargaining for concessions both with the government and rival elite groups. But they also had an inherent fear of violence since it could jeopardise their positions at negotiating tables. However, the crowd had little or no understanding of such interests. Instead, their inchoate feeling of communal solidarity was subjected to elite exploitation. The Divisional Commissioner of Dacca in 1907 did not greatly exaggerate when he reported, "bringing the Hindu and Muhammedan gentlemen (leaders) together ... was an easy thing to do."¹⁶⁴ The government was eventually able to persuade leaders of both communities

159. NNR No. 12 of 1907, p. 206 para-12; NNR No. 15 of 1907, p. 285 para-16, some Hindu newspapers ascribed the Nawab's support for the British to the latter's help in tiding over his pecuniary crisis. See for example NNR No. 13 of 1907, p. 242 para-78.

160. L/P & J/1772/07, IOR, pp. 7-8, Wares to Lees.

161. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, 1907, op. cit. This was a dilemma faced by colonial administrators in the twentieth century who failed to realise that their collaborators were also developing wider political and communal interests.

162. Ibid.; L/P & J/3081/07, IOR, see Clarke's note of June 17, 1907 and Report by Kamini Bhattacharya, SI of Police, June 14, 1907. These zamindari officials forced the shopkeepers in their estates to refrain from selling foreign goods, organising meetings or processions and raising money.

163. L/P & J/1772, IOR, para-4, report by Wares.

164. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 457.

to sign a note deploring the recent 'outrage' and assuring their cooperation with the officials in combating any such future 'breach of peace'.¹⁶⁵ Shortly after the riots gained momentum, the Hindu zamindars, criticised up to that point by the government for their 'very unsatisfactory' political attitude, rushed to present a welcome address to the Lt. Governor.¹⁶⁶ This crowd-leader dichotomy was also evident on the Muslim side. The ordinary Muslim participants in the riot suffered from police harassment, boycott by Hindu *mahajans*, dispossession from land for rent-arrears, and forced sale or mortgage of lands to meet judicial expenditure. Yet, their leaders made no 'organised attempt' to provide funds or legal aid, which led the *Soltan* openly to accuse the Muslim communal leaders of using the less privileged sections of their community as 'pawns' in their game for more jobs and council seats.¹⁶⁷

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The 1906-7 riot strengthened communal solidarities and heightened Hindu-Muslim tensions in Mymensingh. A sense of insecurity persisted among both communities for several weeks after the outbreak had subsided and district officers were kept busy by continuous rumours and alarming calls for help.¹⁶⁸

The violence also had a long-term effect on the evolution of Hindu and Muslim public opinion. It strengthened the position of extremist sections within the district's Hindu society. While the moderates still preferred to dissipate the tension through talks with Muslim upper-class leaders, the radicals candidly asserted: "(their) desire for revenge ... will not be satisfied even with the burning alive of all Muslim *goondas* (toughs) and of the Nawab and his officers".¹⁶⁹

A generalised notion of active government hostility towards the Hindus has been challenged; rather it was the concern of British administrators to define such categories as 'caste' and 'community'

165. Nathan to Chief Secy. July 6, op. cit.; L/P & J/1772/1907, IOR, Interview by Das Bahadur, Minister, Tippera Estate.

166. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 449.

167. Ibid., p. 460.

168. Nathan to Chief Secy., July 6, op. cit., para-21.

169. NNR No of 1907, p. 397 para-74.

that 'encouraged assertiveness and polarisation among Indians'.¹⁷⁰ Whatever the truth of this formulation, in Hindu popular perception the government was seen to be far from impartial during the riots and their leaders now urged them to save the community's honour. The *Sandhya* — an extremist paper which now functioned as a Hindu mouthpiece — wrote :

Let us all come forward now and unite to establish thanas in every town and village ... One's own jurisdiction, one's own home will have to be protected with the aid of these fireworks, of these bombs ... Let the Basanti whose head has been severed at Jamalpur be our aid. This time the worship of the Mother shall have to be conducted with hymns of fire.¹⁷¹

Rabindranath Tagore offered 'a more profound analysis' of the riots and called for the creation of a *mahajati* (great nation) by discarding sectarian prejudices, and organising constructive work in villages to bridge the gap between the *bhadralok* and masses.¹⁷² But the militant and romantic appeal of *Bande Mataram* and *Yugantar* was more alluring to his Hindu contemporaries, who increasingly accepted *bhadralok* perceptions of Muslim rioters as 'hooligans' and 'hired agents' of the British.

The 1906-7 riot showed that Muslim communalism would require an agrarian base in order to develop as a political force in Bengal.¹⁷³ Contemporary Muslim pamphlets increasingly depicted the Hindu *babu* both as exploiter and Congressman. Indeed, three decades later Fazul Huq's Krishak Praja Party was to win the 1927 provincial elections with its *jotedar* base and anti-zamindar manifesto.

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170. P. Robb, 'The Challenge of Gau Mata: British Policy and Religious Change in India, 1880-1916', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20 (2) 1986, pp. 285-319.

171. NNR No. 18 of 1907 p. 365 para-19 ; Also see NNR No. 18 of 1907 p. 365 para-20 and NNR No. 18 of 1907 (Part-II) p. 130, para-46.

172. R. Tagore, *Byadhi o pratikar*, (Calcutta, 1907) ; Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 461.

173. Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., pp. 462-3.

The riots of 1906-7 expressed *inter alia* the socio-economic grievances by the Muslim peasants. The factors which promoted communal tensions in 1906-7 certainly had strong class connotations, while the immediate incidents which set in motion the train of events in Iswarganj and Nandail in 1906 and Jamalpur in 1907 had either socio-economic or political overtones. Sections of contemporary educated opinion categorically singled out 'oppression of the Hindu *zamindars* towards the *rai-yats*' as 'the first and the most prominent cause of the violence'.¹⁷⁴ The targets of attack and pattern of violence also underlined the socio-economic base of the outbreaks; rumours which maintained the momentum of violence were secular rather than religious; A letter published in the *Bande Mataram* (17 May 1907) described the contemporary struggle as being essentially a contest 'between the ignorant multitude and the educated few'.¹⁷⁵

At the same time certain other aspects of the riot such as attacks on lower-class Hindus, defilement of temples and idols, and careful exclusion of Muslim shops from looting, revealed the overt communal consciousness of the crowd. In addition, Muslim leadership came from the religious preachers, and although the outbreak had strong economic and political connotations, the ideology which shaped and gave meaning to the collective actions of the crowd was fundamentally religious. Religion provided the Muslim peasants with a communal identity and a legitimising ideology for action against social, economic and political injustices. David Arnold's observation on the Moplah rebellion is equally applicable to the 1906-7 Mymensingh violence :

peasants are not easily goaded into revolt ... to rise up in revolt there needs to be an ideology to confer a broader legitimation than personal grudge. There needed to be a legitimation firmly rooted in the peasant's own convictions, to outweigh and negate what to him was the phoney 'legality' of landlords, courts and officials.¹⁷⁶

174. *Mihir - o - Sudhakar* June 14, 1907, NNR for week ending June 22, 1907.

175. Quoted in Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, op. cit., p. 455.

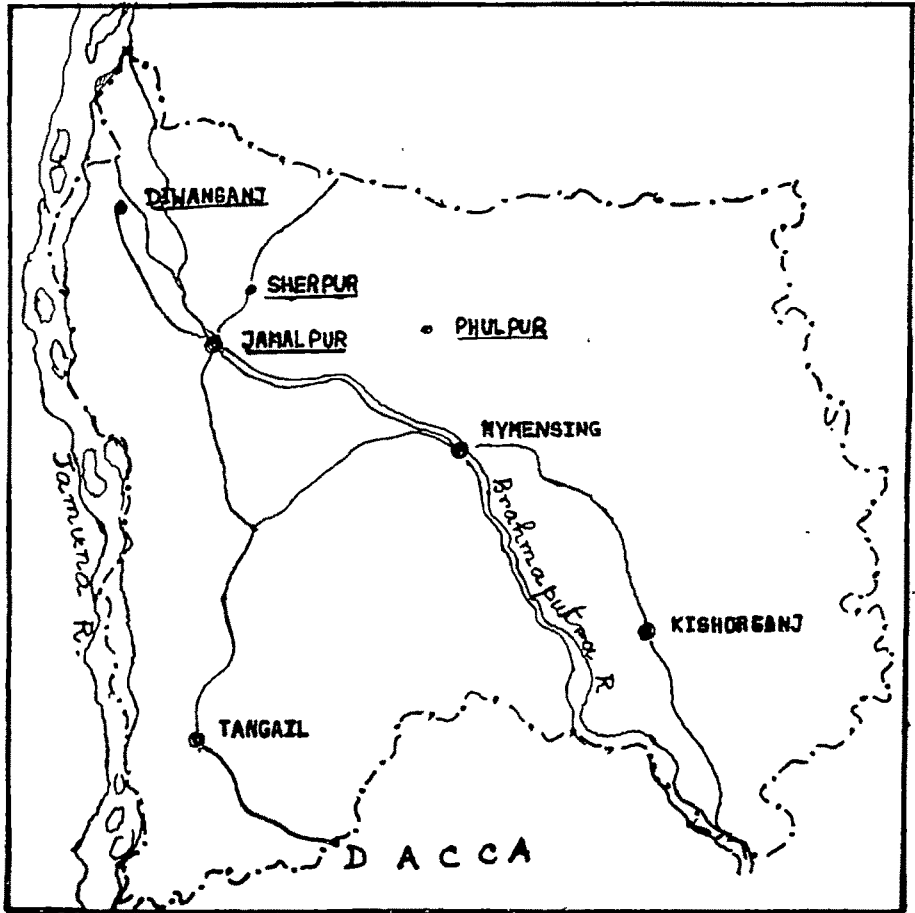
176. D. Arnold, 'Islam, the Mappias and Peasant Revolt in Malabar', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, July 1982, p. 263.

Viewed in this context, economics and faith were linked to and not divorced from each other.

By combining the apparently contradictory trends — secular and religious — the 1906-7 riot anticipated a general pattern in communal violence in modern Bengal. To the student of communal riots in Bengal, the 1906-7 riot is instructive in more than one respect. It was important in itself as an event of momentous consequence in the evolution of Hindu-Muslim relations in the province. It also provides a valuable starting point for a study of the changing nature of communal violence, crowd behaviour and crowd-leadership relations in a region which gained notoriety for fratricidal warfare during the closing years of the Raj. The Mymensingh experience introduced the complexities of communal rioting in Bengal, which combined a generalised protest with communal hatred. The relative strength of these elements changed over a period of time: the riots increasingly lost their class basis and autonomy from institutional politics and by the 1940s became organised, a part of institutional politics and overtly communal.¹⁷⁷ The form that a riot took reflected the nature of interaction between organised and unorganised politics and the complexities of perceptions and views current among the populace.

177. This has been discussed in S. Das, 'Communal Riots'. *op. cit.*

DISTRICT OF MYMENSINGH
(1906-7)



Riot-affected areas :
Dewanganj, Phulpur, Sherpur
and Jamalpur police stations

I am grateful to Prof. B. Banerji for drawing this map.

THE LABOURING POOR AND COMMUNAL RIOTS IN BENGAL, 1896-1919 : THE CASE RE-EXAMINED

PARIMAL GHOSH

Communalism, in the accepted subcontinental sense of a Hindu-Muslim divide, has been variously explained. But whatever the explanation, the general conclusion appears to be inescapable, that assertion of a *distinct* Islamic identity, *seperate* and *different* from that of the Hindus, was crucial to the crystallisation of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. It is also recognised that an important element in this Islamic identity was an anti-colonial strain, specially when the pan-Islamic aspect of this identity is considered.¹

The object of this paper is to examine, in this context, the communal propensity of the labouring classes in and around Calcutta, as reflected in a number of riots in the periods before and after the first world war.

The subject is considered important, because till recently, involvement of labour in communal clashes was generally treated as aberrations, and historians tended to side-step the subject. The first serious investigation of labour's communal mentality was undertaken by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who in a series of seminal papers emphasised the community consciousness of the immigrant labour from Bihar and U. P. in the jute mills of Bengal.² Communalism was implied to be an expression of this community identity. The jute mill hand, it was argued, was typically a person belonging to two different worlds, that of the peasant and that of the worker. Consequently, the peasant's community consciousness continued to

1. Perhaps the best instance is the Khilafat movement.
2. D. Chakrabarty, *Communal Riots & Labour : Bengal's Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s*, Occasional Paper No. 11, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. October 1976. A slightly different version of this article was published in *Past & Present*, May 1981. Also see, *Some Aspects of Labour History of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century : Two Views*, by D. Chakrabarty & R. Das Gupta, Occasional Paper No. 40. CSSSC, October 1981.



be present in the mill hand's attitudes, preventing him from developing a class mentality, which could rise above caste and religious barriers. Conversely, this consciousness of belonging to a community, it was held, enabled people lower down to transcend class barriers and forge vertical alliances with their social superiors.

What seems to have been overlooked in this argument is, that while the peasant undoubtedly lived within his community, his sense of loyalty towards the community may not always have been the only strand in his rural experience. His fights with the zamindars, with the indigo planters, and sometimes with the authorities, were as important in his life as experience as his community consciousness.

In its urban context, as Chakraborty sees it, community consciousness stands on two legs : firstly, the condition of labour, meaning thereby, the organisation of the labour market, process of recruitment, the nature of jobs usually performed, living condition etc, and secondly, the communal behaviour of labour as reflected in the communal riots. Chakraborty's point was that the condition of labour in the 1890s, was such that it tended to reinforce the community linkages of the immigrant labour. Uncared for and exploited by the millowners and the authorities, the labour had to fall back on the familiar security of his community. And this dependence-loyalty syndrome found its expression in the clashes of the communities : the communal riot.

In the present essay, we propose to take off from this point. We shall try to analyse the communal riots of Chakraborty's period and after, to see if there were elements other than communality in these. For, if sentiments, besides hatred for the 'other' community, are found to be present, then, it could be suggested that, at the least, communal riots were not any automatic corollary to community consciousness. It should be noted, that the concept of community consciousness implies not only a sense of identification with one's own community, but also of an implicit differentness, if not outright hostility, towards the other community. Chakraborty's analysis, in fact, suggests that an element of competitiveness, on the lines of the community was in-built in the condition of labour. If communal riots can be shown to have articulated

attitudes other than communal beliefs, then, to that extent, this element of hostility could be taken to be a matter external to the community identity.

After examining the riots we shall briefly explore the official reaction to pan-Islamic eruptions, at the time of World War I, to see how the authorities themselves viewed the situation.

Section : I

An important component of the milieu in which the labourers worked could be, at critical points, the policy of the law enforcing agencies. Often, particularly when the issue was of a communal nature, this policy was marked by indecision. In fairness to the administration, it has to be admitted, that it had to keep its options open. Where the basic objective was maintenance of peace, the authorities could not have afforded to cite only one kind of justification behind its decisions. This could well have given its line of action an appearance of opportunism, which, to say the least, could not have convinced the parties involved of its good faith.

The Rishra kine killing case of May, 1896 may be cited as an instance.³ The trouble here, although a source of considerable tension, did not actually break into a riot. It arose over the insistence of the upcountry Muhammadan mill hands on the sacrifice of a cow on Bakr-Id, and the equally determined opposition to it from local and upcountry Hindus. Several points here were particularly noticeable. There was evidence of a linkage between better class Muhammadans in Calcutta and the local agitators of the same faith ; again, the absence of the same linkage in the immediate locality ; further, the remarkable restraint shown by both the Hindus and the Muhammadans involved here ; and finally, the peculiar ambivalence in the handling of the situation by the authorities.

The linkage between the upper class Muhammadan elements in Calcutta and the agitators was shown by a letter that Nazir Mian, the Imam in Rishra, wrote to Haji Nur Muhammad Zakaria, a

3. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. July 1896, No. 55-56. WBSA.

prominent Muhammadan trader in North Calcutta. Intercepted by the police, the letter revealed that the Imam had sought the help of Zakaria to counter the Hindu plan to obstruct the Bakr-Id sacrifice. We are not too sure, however, that this letter can be taken as representative of a spirit which transcended fundamental class differences. Subsequent to the interception of this letter, the police arrested the Imam. But as this threatened to upset the prayer proceedings, Lang, Magistrate of Hooghly, himself tried to get somebody to stand bail for him. He only found that "with one exception, the leading men had refused, in a body to stand bail, on the ground (to use their own words) that "He is a fakir, and we do not know what he will do".⁴ Clearly, the kind of linkage that held good between Calcutta and Rishra was not effective within Rishra itself. It can be postulated that behind this distrust lay the actual experience of the local "leading men" about the volatile nature of the people they were now asked to stand security for. After all, the Haji was at a distance, and even if he had responded to the Imam's call, it would not have been the same thing as having to be in the middle of an actual flare up.

By the morning of 23rd May, the day before the Bakr-Id, there was further news that Muslims from Barrackpore might come in to help those in Rishra. Steps were taken to stop them, as well as those who might come from Calcutta. Describing what happened the next day, Lang wrote — "On the 24th May, the first day of the Bakr-Id, I went down to Serampore before 6 a.m. I rode straight from the station to Rishra, where I found the streets were guarded by police, but thronged on either side with mill-hands, in some cases five deep, all unemployed, keeping the mosque in view, and loitering about to see what the Muhammadan community, who were also there in great force, intended to do."

4. From the Magistrate of Hooghly to the Commissioner of the Burdwan Division, 24th June 1896. Ibid. For a different interpretation of this riot, see D. Chakrabarty 'Communal Riots & Labour. Bengal Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s'. Occasional Paper No. 11. CSSSC p. 39. Chakrabarty writes : "the letter ... suggests a situation. We have here at the end of the nineteenth century a group of upcountry workers, acutely conscious of their being Muslims, approaching a wealthy Muslim of the city for support for their community demands. The Haji must have appeared in their eyes as a community leader."

The restraint of the people involved was remarkable. True, the police arrangement was heavy enough ; but to explain the restraint only by that is perhaps too simplistic. There could be no prayer on the Bakr-Id day as the prayer reader was in custody, let alone a sacrifice ; yet the Muhammadans kept quiet. Next day, the 25th, news arrived of a cow sacrifice in neighbouring Konnagore, and yet the Hindus did nothing. Lang, who had a meeting with a group of Muhammadans on the day, was — “surprised to find that so far from being sore about the detention of the Imam, they admitted the necessity and justice” of the order. However, “they insisted on the universal prohibition of kurbani as being subversive of their religious rights. So ignorant and ill-informed were they that they were actually under the impression that the British Government intended universally to prohibit the sacrifice of cows, in order to comply with the wishes of the Hindus”.⁵ This, one would have thought, was the stronger reason why the Muslims should become impatient. What Lang told these people complicated the matter considerably. In order to remove a possible threat to peace immediately, he explained that they could easily sacrifice at the “adjoining mosque”.

It would appear that the objective of the Government was to allow such sacrifices only in places where they were consistent with an established custom.⁶ But this was never clearly stated, and nor was it always adhered to, which consequently gave the Government action the appearance of arbitrariness. For instance, when next year, i.e., 1897, the Muhammadans of Rishra again made an attempt to have their sacrifice on the Bakr-Id, their application for permission was turned down on the ground that it had not been submitted on time. The Lieutenant-Governor's response was that the “memorial has been submitted too late to admit of a full and impartial enquiry being now made. Last year an enquiry was made by the subdivisional officer of Serampore, and the Lieutenant-Governor then accepted his conclusions that cows had not been previously sacrificed”. If it is assumed that the Subdivisional Officer's findings were correct, then there could be little point in turning down the application on the particular ground of late

5. Ibid.

6. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. November, 1897. No. 119-124. WBSA.

submission, or in referring the matter to a "full and impartial enquiry".⁷ The issue was finally resolved after the Bakr-Id, when the same SDO, J. A. Craven, decided that the Muhammadans could do their cow sacrifice at their burial ground, a lonely place, not because it was a custom (it was not), but because the educated Bengali gentlemen, who were present during the enquiry, did not object. We have to note that the upcountry Hindus in Rishra continued to object, but now to no avail.⁸

That sometimes this uncertainty in this policy of not allowing a cow sacrifice at a place where it would be an innovation while allowing it in the immediate neighbourhood, could lead to a flare-up, may be seen in some of the cases. The riot on April 12, 1900, among mill-hands at Gouripore in Naihati may be taken as an instance. The demand for permission to perform the Korbani from the Muhammadan mill-hands of the Gouripore Jute Mill was turned down, as the Magistrate of the 24-Parganas had it, "on the grounds that the practice in Naihati would be an innovation, that the agitators were few in number, that they had facilities for slaughtering kine elsewhere, and that the slaughter of kine in Naihati was vigorously opposed by the Hindu inhabitants, who are in an over-whelming majority".⁹

By next morning, however, a rumour spread that a calf has been sacrificed ; some pots of meat were found and that some 200 Hindus with lathies began to beat up Muslim women and children in the bastis. The mill continued to work and, what is indeed remarkable, the Manager succeeded in keeping the Muslim workers from joining the affray. The police soon managed to pacify the crowd and "got the Hindus to resume work". When late in the evening some 150 Muslims from Kankinara Mill tried to enter the town, they were turned back with the assurance "of the steps taken to punish the rioters ... that the Gouripore Mussalmans would be protected".¹⁰

This element of restraint is explicable by the fact that 33 files of the Military Police had arrived on the day of the riot. But more

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Judicial Police. Progs. B. June 1900. No. 215-217. WBSA.

10. Ibid.

important is the fact that the Muslim mill-hands apparently had gone ahead with their sacrifice even after the Magistrate's order. And we can easily note in this order two points which cannot be said to have been calculated to pacify the "turbulently disposed". Thus there was admission of the fact that similar sacrifices took place in the neighbourhood, and that, — as long as the Hindus were in the majority in the bazar, no matter whether the practice was an innovation or not, its performance was prohibited. This could well have appeared to be arbitrary. In view of the restraint shown by the Muslims subsequently it is problematical how they would have reacted if the authorities had been more tactful.

In certain other cases, again, religious differences became mixed up with other issues. We may take for instance, the riot that took place on the same day as the Gouripore episode, at the Lower Hooghly Jute Mill.¹¹ The mill was located some 7 to 8 miles west of Alipore, under Tollygunge thana of the 24 Parganas. The majority of its employees were Muslims living in Metiaburuz and its neighbourhood, while some 500 shared the lines with about an equal number of Hindus. On the Bakr-Id day the Muslims did their usual sacrifice in their "village" outside the mill premises and nothing happened. By 4.30 p.m. however, news reached the Manager that a pig, which was obnoxious to the Muslims, had been killed in the mill premises. The Manager promised to punish the people involved, who were still untraced, and as in a previous case a similar wrong had led to dismissal of the men involved, the Muslims went away peacefully.

The next day the situation took a new turn. The Muslim mill-hands caught hold of 5 Dosadhs and Chamars (low caste Hindus) for alleged involvement in the act, and demanded an immediate action on the part of the Manager. The Manager had to summon police aid from Calcutta, and as talks were proceeding with the agitators, one of them accused the jemadar darwan of having instigated the pig killing. The issue of the darwan now became uppermost in the dispute. As the Magistrate reported : "The grievance appeared to

11. From the Magistrate, 24 Parganas, to the Commissioner of the Presidency Division, 3rd June 1896. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. July 1896. No. 36-38. WBSA.

us as fictitious and was, we were inclined to think, based on other objections to the darwans, not connected with the present proceeding." The Muslim workers repeated their demand the next day and began a strike. As it became clear then — "this darwan was dismissed about a year ago for ill-treating a mistri, but was reinstated."¹² With the Agents of the mill refusing to act, the movement began to spread. The Muslims living in the factory lines agreed to rejoin their work after sometime, but those in Metiaburuz held on. "They did not show any disposition to resort to force. On the contrary, they represented to the inspector that they had stayed away from work, as they feared that if work was resumed with the darwans still in the mill, they might not be able to restrain some of their members from using violence." This kind of cool-headedness is perhaps least expected from a fanatic congregation. In any case, when the agitation threatened to spread to the Upper Hooghly Jute Mill in Garden Reach, a sister concern, the Agents retreated. The Manager had to say in writing that the 14 darwans had left, only upon which work was resumed.¹³

How should we read this episode? The darwans were Hindus, and their detractors Muslims; and the objects or rituals over which the episode occurred had religious significance. But the fact remains, that the darwans as the peace-keepers within the mill on behalf of the management, were in relations of contradiction to the operatives. In fact they had to leave in the end. It is, indeed, interesting how the Dosadhs and Chamars were almost forgotten in the settlement.

It may be argued, from all the cases cited, that the communal spirit in the work force was something given, and that the Government's inept handling or some such provocations only made it surface. However, riots or such flare-ups were occasional or extraordinary events. Had community consciousness been as vital a fact of life as has been supposed, it would not have been possible for these people to work on the same shop-floor, or to fight unitedly to secure their ends, fights which occasionally were no less riotous than the 'communal' flare-ups.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

We have seen in the context of the troubles in Rishra in May 1896, that there was always a possibility of a link-up between the tension in the industrial belt and that in Calcutta. It is not surprising, given the similarity of the places of origin of the people involved and their comparable experience in terms of living condition. Perhaps the best known example of this contact occurred in 1897, at the time of the Talla riot in the northern part of Calcutta. The riot itself had broken out over a disputed plot of land on which the Muhammadans of the area had wanted to build a mosque.¹⁴ A letter in Bengali, purported to have been written by Haji N. M. Zakaria (the same individual to whom the Imam of Rishra had written), asking for help from the Muslim mill-hands, created a lot of excitement among them in the Kankinara Jute Mill. They followed up by a regular march to the Kankinara Paper Mill and then to the Anglo-India and Alliance Jute Mills of Jagaddal.¹⁵ At the latter mill they proceeded to break open the gate and threatened to attack the European quarters. The engine-room was ransacked, and when a gun was fired at them, they retreated to break up the tile roofs of the cooly lines. As the Agents reported — “Two of their leaders were called forward to state their grievance which was to the effect that we were very much at fault for not having stopped the Mill at 6 O’clock and sent out all Muhammadans in our employ to join their marching on Calcutta to riot against the Government.”¹⁶ As the police reported, the workers were not too sure that the letter was actually written by the Haji, as it was in Bengali and the Haji did not know the language, and they only wanted to meet to consider it. But whether this shows the hold of the Haji’s name over these people,¹⁷ or their anxiety over what they took to be a threat to their co-religionists on the occasion of a big riot, remains an open question. Interestingly enough, according to one source, their reported intention was rioting against the Government, which is not quite the same thing as a communal clash.

14. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. November 1897. No. 39-43. WBSA.

15. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. September 1897. No. 101-103. WBSA.

16. Annual Report of the IJMA, 1897.

17. Chakrabarty, D. *Communal Riots and Labour : Bengal’s Jute Mill Hands in the 1890s*, op. cit., p. 45.

The Talla riot in Calcutta was possibly the severest single episode that rocked the city in the 1890s. For two days, the 30th of June and the 1st of July, 1897, pitched street battles were fought between the rioters and the police. The army had to show its presence before quiet was restored. The police report was that — “The rioter were composed mostly of low-class Muhammadan weavers and brick-layers, who were joined by the bad characters of the disturbed area. The rioters’ chief object of attack was the police, but several Europeans were assaulted in the streets.”¹⁸ Isolated instances of insults to Christian and Hindu passers-by also occurred, (though they never seemed to have been the objects of any concerted attack).

With good logic Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that elements of pan-Islamism were present in the consciousness of the rioters. But surely the source of this identification should be sought in the context in which the rioters functioned. As Chakrabarty himself noted : “Even things nearer to the daily lives of the city poor, and some of the immediate problems also, often received a pan-Islamist interpretation. The middle of the 1890s were years of problems for the city poor too, as much as they were for the jute mill workers”.¹⁹

A fundamental element in this context of daily lives was the terrible scare of the plague. All the terrors that lurked in the given conditions of the slums now were unleashed. The cure that the Government prescribed seemed to the workers to be worse than the pestilence. Introduced in November 1897 the policy provided that the sick should be removed to special plague hospitals ; people close to them put into health camps, their houses evacuated and disinfected before they were allowed to be used. Understandably, the city authorities could do hardly otherwise, given the state of the slums where plague had struck most, and the pecuniary condition of the inhabitants. In fact for the upper classes this policy was soon modified and segregation allowed in the patient’s house in regulated conditions. But this only emphasised the inevitability of the doom that appeared to face the poorer plague victims.

18. From the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, to the Chief Secretary, GOB, 22nd July, 1897. Judicial. Police. Progs. A. November 1897, No. 39-43, op. cit.

19. Chakrabarty op. cit. p. 54. For Chakrabarty’s views on pan-Islamism see pp. 50-58, passim.

The panic on 29th April, 1898, the day on which the Government was seriously considering announcement of the outbreak of plague in the city, was thus described by Dr. Cook, the Health Officer, — “By noon the excitement in the town was intense. In business houses and in bazars, streets and bustees the question was discussed, had the dreaded Bombay plague come at last, were their houses going to be forcibly entered, and their wives and daughters torn away by British soldiers, was quarantine to be established, and were they all to be forcibly inoculated. The result of this was one of the biggest panics on record ... it was plague measures rather than plague that they fled from”. Cook estimated that from a quarter to a third of the city’s population left in this great exodus.²⁰

The panic sometimes crystallised into attacks on the city’s visible symbols of order and authority. Cook reported that the ambulance carts became the targets of the wrath of the people as the visible carriers of death. “It was rumoured that something was put to the patients in the ambulance, and they died after smelling it ; also that there was a poisoned needle concealed in it which killed them.”²¹ We also hear of an Austrian being beaten to death as he was taken to be an inoculator. When Dr. Laing, a District Medical Officer, went to inspect the house of a local pleader in Bhowanipore for setting up a private family hospital, it led to a small scale riot in which Dr. Laing had to shoot down two to save himself. On May 3 a veritable showdown took place in parts of north Calcutta, along Circular Road, Cornwallis Street, Machooa Bazar, Chitpore Road etc. The typical targets were 3 vaccinators whom the crowd took to be inoculators ; a police inspector at the crossing of Chitpore Road and Grey Street ; a constable of Sukea Street thana ; a native Christian of Cornwallis Street. Further, a tram driver was hurt when a mob attacked two European passengers, and two Europeans were severely assaulted in front of the Medical College.²² According to an eyewitness report — “Their [the rioters’] fury ... was specially directed against Europeans and policemen, and any one whom they supposed to be in any way connected with the work of

20. *Report of the Epidemics of Plague in Calcutta* by Dr. Bright. 1900. Section by Dr. Cook. p. 10-11.

21. Ibid.

22. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 4, 1898.

inoculation and vaccination, while carriages and tram-cars too never escaped their rough handling".²³

In the industrial suburbs the virulence of the plague was not as acute. The pattern of unrest there, however, was similar to that in Calcutta. On May 3, in Howrah, a crowd ransacked the Court house, humiliated a well-known pleader, and severely beat up an inoculator and a European passer-by who intervened.²⁴ In Cossipore anyone in European dress ran a risk.²⁵

A wave of strikes followed among the labouring poor. Largely organised to demand relief from the official measures, it also came to seek monetary compensation for working during the epidemic. By May 20, 50% of the sweepers went on strike on the former ground.²⁶ Several importing houses of the city were hit by strikes among their coolies.²⁷ By the first week of June, 50 of the 70 syces of the Tramways had left.²⁸ Domestic servants, washermen, ayahs, all were on their way out.²⁹ Also, from the very beginning, the supplies in the city markets had been affected.³⁰ The demand for higher wages was taken up by a varied section of the labouring people, — the municipal carters, some mill hands in Baranagore, and even hackney carriage drivers charged more.³¹

The city, understandably, became a hot-bed of rumours, and it is of interest to see how they reflected the immediate context of those who believed in them. When Raja Benoy Krishna Deb Bahadur was inoculated with his whole family, the sight was watched by some 2000 low class Muslims. "When they found that he did not die within two hours, as they firmly believed he would, they explained the matter thus. They said that there are three kinds of

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid. Also see *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 5, 1898. Judicial Police. Progs. A August 1898. No. 14-16. WBSA.

25. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, May 6, 1898.

26. Ibid May 21, 1898.

27. Ibid June 3, 1898.

28. Ibid June 7, 1898.

29. Ibid June 10, 11, 13, 1898.

30. Ibid May 9, 1898.

31. Ibid June 21, July 9, 1898. Also see Cook's description of the exodus from the city in the Report of the Epidemics of Plague etc.

serum prepared ; one was meant for the Sahebs, which is quite innocent ; another is meant for the Bengalee Babus, which brings on a little fever ; and the third, which is deadly poison, is meant for the poor people ..."³² This is a clear illustration of how the daily experiences in a class-divided society were reflected in the psyche of the down and out. Pan-Islamism also had its share, and manifested itself as an anti-authority attitude. When the Muhammadan syces of the Sheriff of Calcutta struck work, their spokesmen reportedly said — "We must go away for we are convinced ... that the Government is determined to kill every Muhammadan that it can. We have been told that Russia is coming to India. Russia is the friend of Turkey, and if the former country attacked India, the English are afraid that Indian Muhammadans would rally round the standard of the friends of the Caliph. That is the reason why the Government are anxious to get rid, in a quiet way, of all Muhammadans."³³ Hence, the plague, and the survival of only a few people in the Government hospitals. The anti-authority sentiment came out even more clearly in a rumour which ended in a court case. Sheikh Delu was accused of circulating false rumours and thereby causing a strike in the stable of Cook and Company. He was supposed to have said that people were fleeing Calcutta because the police were herding them into plague camps where they were made to inhale some medicine which killed them. Therefore — "the accused argued that the only remedy left in their hands was to strike in a body, syces, khan-samas, bisties, etc. and then to arm themselves with *lathies*, go to the *maidan* and there to thrash all the *Sahebs* and *mems* and outrage their modesty. Then he said, the Sahebs would take off their *topees* and fall at their feet."³⁴ The court sentenced the man to a year's r.i.

We may note that there were at times direct involvement of law enforcing agencies in aggravating a situation. Two classic cases of this order would be the Bakr-Id riots in 1910 at Beliaghata and Alipore.

The Beliaghata episode of December 13 occurred in Charpara Basti where Hindus objected to the Bakr-Id sacrifice. Subsequently

32. Amrita Bazar Patrika, May 11, 1898.

33. Ibid, May 12, 1898.

34. Ibid. May 21, 1898.

the two sides were persuaded that the sacrifice should be held at Dhobitala mosque, which was situated within railway property. As it turned out, on the day of the Id, on their way to this mosque with the sacrificial cow — “the Muhammadans were confronted by a number of Hindu constables and two head-constables of the Railway Police armed with lathies, who rushed forward assuming a threatening attitude and shouting, and tried to prevent the cow being taken to the masjid.” It was further added, that — “when ordered to go back by the Superintendent, Railway Police, the head constables and constables obeyed reluctantly, and had to be formed up at the back of the masjid where they were ordered to go back to their lines.” The excitement of the files here should specially draw our attention — “After proceeding a short distance the Hindu head-constables and constables of the Railway police broke their ranks and tried to start a fresh disturbance. Finally, they were brought back to their lines, where under orders of the Superintendent, Railway Police, they were detained until the sacrifice was over and their names were taken down.”³⁵

Two points need to be stressed here. First, though the dispute started between the two communities in the basti, we do not seem to hear much about the involvement of the Hindus of the basti once it was decided that the sacrifice should take place at a particular place. The subsequent events involved only the railway police and the Muhammadans. The second striking point is the possibility of a latent hostility between the railway force and inhabitants of the slum.

The other incident, the looting of the Sahan Begum mosque on the same day in New Alipore, was more serious, for men of the armed forces appeared to have been involved. The main occupants of the lines in the barrack were men of the 66th Punjabis from Barrackpore; besides there were a few men of the 27th Punjabis, some recruits — both Muhammadan and Sikh, their instructors, men of the band and signallers, plus 12 or 15 followers. The whole incident remained vague till the end, but the involvement of at least some of these men was clear. The story of the Muhammadans in the mosque was that 15 or 16 men from the

35. Political. Police. Progs. A. April 1911. No. 14-16. WBSA.

lines made a raid on the mosque with pieces of fire wood, where while some loosened the sacrificial cows, others assaulted the Muslims and tore up the Koran. The raiders then retreated back to the lines.³⁶

The Deputy Commissioner of Police, Southern Suburbs, who shortly arrived, found a Sikh with a head injury, who turned out to be a Khalasee, attached to the 27th Punjabis. Also were recovered a Punjabi shoe, a pugree and an axe of a type used in the lines.³⁷ The only matter of doubt, it seemed, was whether the assailants were regular troops or merely camp followers.³⁸ The officials concluded that the camp followers aided by outsiders were behind the mischief.³⁹ At any rate, the non-involvement of the general population outside the lines should still strike us. An official observer who toured the surrounding regions in Watgunge, Ekbalpore, Alipore and Garden Reach thanas shortly afterwards found no trouble to report. Similar was the report from Metiaburuz and the Hooghly Jute Mills.⁴⁰

In fact by the late 1920s the communal infection within the law enforcing forces had emerged as a district element in the Government's consideration. In a confidential note in January, 1928, Tegart observed, that Indian garrisons, though by and large neutral on such issues, cannot be relied upon in "all cases without exception". Tegart recalled how in 1924 communal eruptions outside the barracks had agitated the troops in Calcutta. The Muhammādans and Sikhs had come to fight and one of the centres of trouble had been Karaya in Ballygunge, "in the immediate vicinity of the Scindie Horse" in the barracks there. "The Scindie Horse were Sikhs and it was clear that they were very exercised" and so had to be confined to the lines.⁴¹

The possibility of a latent hostility between law enforcing agencies and rioters, when the latter were ostensibly aggressing upon

36. From the Chief Secretary, GOB, to the Secretary, GOI, Home Dept. 22nd April, 1911. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Note by Col. O'Bryan Commander, 27th Punjabis. Ibid.

40. Report by V. Bromage, dated 12. 12. 1910. Ibid.

41. Political. Political. 1927 File No. 608 (1-2). Confidential. WBSA.

a different and distinct entity, may sometimes be read from the behavioural pattern of the rioters.

Take for instance the riots at Titaghar and Serampore on 3rd and 4th January, 1909. The previous year the Muhammadans had to sacrifice in a new site, to the east of the railway line at Titaghar, as the old site had been built over. In 1909 the new site was again chosen, and as it was stated, neither the police nor the mill authorities had any reason to doubt that the order to sacrifice in the year-old site would be flouted.⁴² But it so happened that on the 3rd when the procession with the sacrificial cow reached a way side mosque the Muhammadans suddenly proceeded to do the sacrifice there. This led to the immediate arrest of the leaders, which in turn excited the crowd leading to a rush on the neighbouring bazar and a general assaulting and looting of the Hindus. A small 'thakur bari' was defiled, and the Hindus made a counter attack on the mosque. A company of 92 Panjabis from Barrackpore was introduced and some 300 Muhammadans came to be arrested. This, however, only served to encourage the Hindus. The news spread rapidly to the other side of the river; a large number of Muhammadans from Serampore crossed over but came to be intercepted by the military at Khardah. Firing and bayonet charges followed, leaving 1 dead and 2 wounded.⁴³

More serious things were in store for the 4th. As the Burdwan Commissioner reported, Muhammadan emissaries apparently came over to get their co-religionists in all the mills on the Hooghly's right bank to cross over and attack the Hindus who had defiled the mosque and who had got the authorities to shoot the Muhammadans. "The Muhammadan mill hands from the mills from Telinipara (South of Chandernagore) downwards to Serampore came out yesterday morning (the 4th) armed with lathies and marched in a body, down the G. T. Road with the intention of joining the important body of Muhammadans at Rishra, South of Serampore, and then of all crossing the river together."⁴⁴ They

42. From the Offg. Chief Secretary, GOB., to the Secretary, GOI., Home Department, 9th January, 1909. Home. Police. Progs. A. February 1909. No. 149-155. NAI.

43. Ibid.

44. Report from the Burdwan Commissioner, dated 5. 1. 1909. Ibid.

came to be intercepted by the Sub-divisional Magistrate, but defying him, the mob advanced up to the Hospital. There they got completely out of hand, pulled about the few policemen present — “while some of them actually came up to the Magistrate brandishing their lathies in his face but desisting from actually striking him. They addressed him as ‘Tum’ and asked what business he had to stop them”.⁴⁵ The Magistrate next retreated upto Mahesh Police outpost on G. T. Road where a dozen armed police were lined up across the road. The mob came up to the place at 8:30 a.m. The Magistrate in front of the police, on horseback, parleyed for 45 minutes. A couple of ringleaders were arrested. A 3rd was caught, but was snatched away. “The mob gradually came surging forward to within 10 or 15 yards of the Magistrate, and the police, and some of the more prominent kept leaping out close up to the Magistrate, raising their lathies with both hands as if to strike him. They now seemed determined to force their way on at all risks ...”⁴⁶ After repeated warnings, firing in the air and brick batting and throwing of lathis from the other side, the police fired into the crowd killing 3 and injuring 5 others.

The eruption seemed to have subsided after this as rapidly as it had developed. So, shortly afterwards Hastings, Wellington and the Champdani mills were found to be working normally. On the 4th afternoon, mill-hands from Shamnagar, some 2000 strong, were intercepted north of Barrackpore railway station, and Bompas, the District Magistrate, with the help of the local Muhammadan priest, could in fact persuade them to return. Nothing happened even when a pig's carcass was discovered on the 5th morning in a local mosque. There was some excitement in Calcutta where mill-hands in small groups started for Titaghur. But Halliday, the Police Commissioner, could break them up, and the Nawab of Dacca, motoring up to places helped to pacify the crowd.⁴⁷

Very clearly in this case, the role played by the forces of law and order became crucial. The riot started when the Muhammadans

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

47. From the Offg. Chief Secretary, GOB., to the Secretary, GOI, Home Deptt., 9th January, 1909. Ibid.

defied the official orders and saw their leaders arrested. Their wrath fell upon the Hindus and reports of looting would suggest that at least some of the Hindus must have been shopkeepers. And perhaps it would not be too far-fetched to visualise a latent hostility between the mill-hands and the bazar shopkeepers, which could flare up on the Bakr-Id issue. The subsequent engagements with the Police, the demonstrative defiance of authority — note the ‘tum’ addressed to the Magistrate, the brandishing of lathis, the leaping processionists, all seemed to be indicative of a conflict that was essentially extra-communal in its dimensions. Again, note how the Muhammadan emissaries to the mills accused the Hindus not only of defiling the mosque but of having got the Police to shoot at the Muhammadans. The carcass in the mosque did not lead to anything either.

There was also the remarkably quick subsiding of excitement. Nothing happened in Calcutta, though excitement had reached there. In fact there was almost a symbolic character in the entire demonstration. Consider how the processionists brandished their lathis but took care not to strike the Magistrate. The pejorative ‘tum’ only seemed to emphasize the point.

The hostile relationship between the official forces and specific classes of people may be seen even in the '20s. For instance, the Kankinara riot of October 1924 could at all take place because a Hindu Sub-inspector chose to side with his co-religionists in a dispute over routes to be taken by an immersion procession of Goddess Durga. The Muslims held that the proposed route of the procession, which went past two mosques, was an innovation, and this was later so proved. But the Hindu ASI, Surendra Chandra Nath — “who was the only police officer who had been in Kankinara last year, backed up his co-religionists in this lying statement”. The subsequent flare up directly flowed from this.⁴⁸

Sometimes, again, one may note the same contradiction in a slightly different form, for instance, — in the relationship between darwans and the coolies. We have already seen one example of this. In the Calcutta riots of 1926, which in terms of communal bitterness surpassed all previous riots in the city, again, the role of the Hindu

48. Political. Police. Progs. B. November 1925. No. 70-77. WBSA.

darwans in the commercial establishments around Dalhousie Square came into prominence. The Memon Surtee and other Muhammadan merchants of Calcutta had to make a formal complaint to the Government of Bengal on this. They drew attention to the "attitude of the up-country Hindu darwans" of Clive Row, Clive Street, Dalhousie Square and Strand Road, — "where all important banks, mercantile offices, general post and telegraph offices, Western jetties and ghats are located," and how by their actions they had created "an atmosphere of insecurity" so that "our entire business has come to a standstill and our life and property is in serious danger". As subsequent investigation proved, between 23rd and 27th of April the darwans in the office buildings of the area had been involved in cases of assault upon Muhammadan passers — by or hackney carriage drivers. On 25th April, the darwans of Turner Morrison, Allahabad Bank etc. had even made plans to raid Radha Bazar and the Canning Street mosque.⁴⁹

It is possible to argue that the contradiction between the mill hand and the mill darwan may not have been reflected in the actions of darwans of the mercantile premises in the heart of Calcutta. But it is also possible to appreciate that the darwan represented a specific rung in the hierarchy of the menial staff at the bottom of which was the ordinary cooly. In fact the darwan's relationship with such men as the cooly and the mill-hand was antagonistic, because he was the watchdog of a different and hostile class. It is understandable, thus, why conflicts should occur between the darwan and the lesser beings as and when opportunities presented themselves.

Yet we should remember that in terms of communal frenzy the 1920s were distinguishable from the earlier years. The all-India configuration warranted what we may call a degree of political investment in communalism, leading to the use of communal riots as a direct instrument of pressure on State or on other a communal groups. Over time this would involve an attempt at incorporating the vast urban and industrial population in communal practice. The fact that even in the '20s it is possible to identify elements extraneous to communal ideology reveals that even in the height of communalism such extraneous elements had a role to play.

49. Political. Political. 1926 File No. 243 (1-7). Confidential. WBSA.

In a way the Calcutta riot of 1926 typified the new communal spirit. Off and on, hostilities between Hindus and Muhammadans in the city continued from April till October with considerable casualties on both sides. It seemingly started on April 2, when during a procession by Arya Samajists "one fanatical drummer did not stop and beat his drum more violently ... " in front of a mosque.⁵⁰ It may be noted that in those days the issue of music before mosques had become politically important.

There cannot be any question about the considerable involvement of the mill-hands, and more generally, of the cooly class in these eruptions. We come across repeated references during the April clashes, to people who fled into the bustis when chased, to the cooly, the Muhammadan boatmen and the Hindu carters. The majority of the processionists at Ulto Rath in July came from the Chitpur mill area.⁵¹ In October when large scale disturbances took place in the industrial areas the participants came in heavily from the industrial hands. It was even specifically observed that the major centres of tension were in the urban industrial belt and not in the villages where things had remained quiet.⁵²

But what really impresses us is the conspicuous role played by other groups, the merchants, the professionals and the established politicians. In the April eruptions the role of Arya Samaj was quite palpable. Its definitive stand was all the more marked because of the fact that it looked so different from their earlier position in 1919. As Deputy Commissioner P. C. Lahiri observed — "At one time they were great friends of the Muhammadans and now they are at loggerheads."⁵³

The role of the business community was particularly seen in the July phase. The procession of Raj Rajeshwari, around which the riot reopened was, in fact, the show of the yarn merchant of Sutapatty. On June 1, it was found that an attempt was being made by the organisers to turn the procession into a Hindu demonstration.

50. Political Police. 1926. File No. 174 (1-24) Confidential. WBSA.

51. Political. Police. 1926 File No. 315 (1-10). Confidential WBSA.

52. Political. Political. 1926 File No. 516 (1-14). Confidential WBSA.

53. Political Police. 1926. File No. 315 (1-10). op. cit.

It was widely advertised in the press and leaflets were circulated. When the authorities changed the proposed route of the procession a protest hartal followed on June 3. The same day a public meeting was held at Town Hall where among speakers were N. N. Sircar, a barrister, who made "a strong speech condemning the action of the authorities as inspired by bias in favour of the Muhammadans."⁵⁴

On July 15, the day when the procession at last took place, again, a type of organisation was evident on both sides which had not been seen before. The procession came to be repeatedly obstructed, and conversely, whenever it passed through Hindu areas, Muhammadan passers-by and shopowners were assaulted. Some of the striking instances may be noted. In front of the Dinu Chamrawalla's mosque, a group led by Haji Alla Bux, a fruit vendor, demanded that music should be stopped. This group was dispersed. On Harrison Road 15 Muhammadan volunteers in Khaki and Turkish cap demonstrated in front of the house of Rai Saheb Ram Deo Chokani. At Natun Bazar some 200 upcountry Hindus attacked the Muhammadan stall keepers. At Mirbahar Ghat, where the march ended, Muhammadan boatmen staged an attack while the whistle of S. S. Kohistan on the river "was blown loudly and continuously, evidently to rally the Muhammadan lascars and boatmen ..."⁵⁵

The authorities had no doubt about the organisation involved in the obstructions to the procession. The original intention, they said, was to offer passive resistance to it, but it also came to be known that H. S. Suhrawardy had "visited the neighbourhood shortly before the occurrence and that his temper before he did so was such as to cause more cautious leaders to warn him". Further, we may note here the enquiries made by A. K. Ghuznavi on the question of music before mosque from all districts in Bengal and the excitement which it created. There was no doubt about the sense of grievance it produced by highlighting the provocation of music before mosques.⁵⁶

The extensive pamphleteering that went on again reflected a degree of elite organisation. The *Forward* was prosecuted for

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

reprinting a Muhammadan leaflet in Urdu said to have been in circulation in Beniapukur. It deplored the alliance between the Bengalis and the Marwaris, and described how the Bengalis had been attacking the Muslims, setting fire to their bustis and looting their shops. Muhammadans should not sit idly in peace. "For one Muhammadan life hundreds of kefer lives should be taken... Seek to avoid detection by the police. Women and children are not to be slain". Bengali leaflets were also in evidence and the one which the *Forward* printed in February, 1926 (note, that this was actually two months before the riot started), warned that if the Muslims did not take care, then it would be difficult for them to preserve their dignity and the glory of their faith ; indeed, they would be reduced to slaves of the unbelievers.⁵⁷

But more decisive was the role of the new electoral politics in the situation. Leaders "who might have been expected from their education and understanding, to do their best to heal the present deplorable rift", actually did the opposite. Political parties similarly were reported to be fighting the election campaigns in "a frankly and uncompromisingly communal spirit".⁵⁸ Evidence of upper class organisation was also seen in the attempt to stage a boycotting of Muhammadan artisans during the Puja festivals. Marwaris who depended upon Muhammadan dyers were seen to have 'imported' a number of Hindu dyers from their own country. Muhammadan bandsmen, coachmen and syees suffered similarly, as did the Muhammadan tailors who practically ran the piece-good and ready-made clothing business in the city.⁵⁹

Yet it has to be understood that politicalisation of communalism had its limitations set by the immediate locale and time. 1926 had come after a phase of close cooperation between the two communities in the early '20s which had seen not only political militancy in the non-cooperation movement, but also prolonged industrial strife in the mill areas. How far a backlash was produced as a result of the subsiding of the secular unrest, leading up to 1926, — deserves consideration. We may see that in May 1929 when the entire mill

57. Political. Police. 1926. File No. 228 (1-12). Confidential. WBSA.

58. Political. Police. 1926. File No. 315 (1-10). op. cit.

59. Political. Political. 1926. File No. 516 (1-14) op. cit.

area was seething with the anticipation of the coming general strike, nothing happened at Bakr-Id, excepting two minor incidents at Rishra and Bauria.⁶⁰

At Rishra, Hindu and Muhammadan crowds confronted each other when the Muhammadans deviated from the route set for the beef-carrying carts. But nothing seemed to have happened. The police could get the people to disperse without use of force, even though there had been considerable ill feeling between the two communities at Rishra for sometime past".⁶¹

At Bauria, on the other hand, the incident turned out to be a conflict between the Nepali darwans and the Muhammadan mill hands. Hindu workers were initially with the darwans, a fact which had led the Manager to disallow korbani within the lines ; but when the Muhammadans sacrificed in a nearby village the darwans were alone to strike.⁶²

Elsewhere, in the city proper, we may note that more often than not compromises were worked out. In Mechua Bazar, at Burman Mosque, an Urdu leaflet was found warning the Muhammadans that the Hindus would resist with full force if Korbani took place ; but this was, in fact, hushed up when the Mutwali reported it to the police. At Garcha, sacrifice was proposed in a private house, and though Suhrawardy took interest in it, the police could stop it on the ground that sufficient notice had not been given. In Bhowanipore, again, the Muhammadans allowed two cows to be bought off them. In Mominpur when the Mayurbhanj family protested against a proposed sacrifice in a mosque where none had taken place for 15 years, the Deputy Commissioner could persuade the devotees to do it in a neighbouring mosque. The most interesting report came from Cossipore. It was said that the Muhammadan residents around Moti Jheel mosque were against Korbani "as there are no suitable arrangement for it." The matter took a turn for the worse only through a dispute over a plot of land in front of the mosque,

60. Political. Political. 1926. File No. 234 Confidential. WBSA.

61. From the District Magistrate of Hooghly to the Chief Secretary, GOB., 21st May 1929. Ibid.

62. From the Superintendent of Police, Howrah, to the District Magistrate of Howrah, 21st May 1929. Ibid.

between some local Muhammadans and a Hindu cartowner. The latter was supported by the landlords, the Chamarja family of Howrah. The Hindus in order to strengthen their claim, decided not to allow even the prayers on the Id day, upon which the landlords came to be warned by the police. The landlord had to promise to ensure peace.⁶³

Section - II

The difference between the 1890s and the war years was that by the latter time the mode of articulation of pan-Islamic ideology had begun to reflect the pulls and pushes of modern politics. Leaders with sectional commitments had emerged from within the fold of modern politics to whom the turbulence of the poorer sections afforded so much muscle power. Their political ambition had its own dynamics which was to transform the contours of the ideology from being a vehicle of populist discontents to a vehicle for securing sectional goals. A fuller manifestation of this was seen in the 1920s when constitutional changes created newer opportunities for sectional politics.

In 1911 the Government of the United provinces had reported⁶⁴ how in the early stages sympathy for Turkey in the Turco-Italian War was shared also by the Hindus. The Shia-Sunni unity over the bombardment of the Shia-shrine at Meshed in the beginning of April 1912, was also remarked upon. On 9th June a joint meeting was held in Lucknow chaired by the leading Sunni of the town — Maulana Abdul Majid, who stressed that the Meshed affair hurt both the sects. Officials further added that it appeared that — “even the great bulk of illiterate Muhammadans have heard of the Turco-Italian War. They regard it as a contest between Muslims and non-Muslims, and their sympathies are entirely with the Turks”. True “(among) this class public questions and foreign affairs ordinarily excite no interest. But if any subject is connected with

63. From the Commissioner of Police, Calcutta, to the Chief Secretary, GOB., 3rd May and 22nd May, 1929. Ibid.

64. From the Chief Secretary, Government of U.P., to the Secretary, GOI., Home Department, 16th July, 1912. Political, 1912, File No. 290 (1-16), Confidential, WBSA.

religion, fanaticism is easily aroused. There is already a vague feeling very widespread that H.M. the King-Emperor ought to have intervened in favour of the Turks." There was also an element of racialism, which meant that in this context pan-Islamism was more anti-Western or anti-Christian than otherwise. So there was the belief in the existence of a Christian feeling and conspiracy among European powers to destroy Islam. European action at the end of the Turko-Greek War was recalled and British policy in the current war unfavourably contrasted with the agitation after Turkish action in Armenia.⁶⁵

The overwhelming concern of the U.P. Government seemed to have remained the possibility of a Hindu-Muslim unity emerging on the question. Three years before this, it was noted, there had been such a unity in the Council elections. Council reforms had followed providing for greater association of non-official elements with Government power, which had won over the Muhammadan members of the Legislative Council. Now it would be a matter of regret — "if a similar spirit were revived in a stronger form by the coalition of the two principal sections of the Indian people."⁶⁶

These were no doubt matters that worried Government of India and enquiries were made about the situation elsewhere. The findings of the Bengal Government were, to start with, less than sensational. Calcutta's Police Commissioner reported that there was no serious discontent among the Muhammadans, while the Burdwan Commissioner observed that only Rs. 500/- could be raised as subscription for the Turkish war victims. Similarly, the Commissioner of the Presidency Division reported a lack of concern among the educated, though, he said, there was uneasiness among the uneducated Muhammadans which could be aggravated by a critical defeat of the Turkish forces. About issues nearer home, such as the refusal of the Government to have Aligarh as an All-India Muslim University, there was a general lack of concern.⁶⁷

Such was the situation even in September, 1912. Somehow after this there appeared to be a change. By April 1913 Stevenson

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

Moore informed the Government of India that the state of Muhammadan feeling was engaging the serious attention of the Bengal Government, and that, therefore, district officers have been asked to keep in close touch with the Muhammadan gentry.⁶⁸ He further noticed a keen interest in the progress of the war among classes "which (were) ordinarily unmoved by political events," and that "organised steps have been taken in most districts outside Calcutta to hold meetings and collect funds for the Red Crescent Society. In many cases the proceeds from the sale of the skins of animals sacrificed at the Bakr-Id were made over to the Turkish Fund." The amount of money collected was also reported to be considerable.⁶⁹

Interestingly enough, an 'isolated case' of an attempt to preach jihad, was reported from Serampore, in Hooghly district. "An old and fanatical Muhammadan named Haidar, who lives in Chander-nagore, and is well known there for the feelings of implacable hostility which he entertains towards the British, is said to be employed on a mission to inflame the minds of the Muhammadan mill hands." The Government of Bengal discounted much of what was heard of this man and the only fact which seemed to be confirmed was that Haidar was collecting subscriptions from Muhammadans mill hands. The fact, however, remained that among the mill hands themselves there was no sign of general unrest. "The only mill in which there has been somewhat serious labour trouble is the Hastings Mill, but there are no grounds for believing that the trouble is due to other than purely local causes."⁷⁰

But the point of the matter was Government of Bengal's anxiety over the association between jihad and the mill hands, and over the fact that the jihad was by a man of implacable hostility towards the Raj. The Government was also worried that "the Muhammadan opinion as a whole has largely veered round to the belief that England, as the greatest Moslem Power in the world, has not shown

68. From the Chief Secretary, GOB., to the Secretary, GOI., Home Department, 10th April 1913, Political 1913, File No. 66 (4-5), Confidential, WBSA.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

sufficient practical sympathy with Turkey and should have exerted her immense influence to secure intervention at the time when the abortive peace conference was held.”⁷¹

The excitement and mutual suspicion between the Raj and the Muhammadan community heightened with the Cawnpore riots of the time.

The Government became increasingly aware that pan-Islamic politics was taking a turn which it may find difficult to control over time. The Lieutenant-Governor of the U. P., Meston, gave a fairly comprehensive description of the new activists in his Minute of 21st August 1918.⁷² He noted how the Turkish affair had brought to the surface young Muhammadans who promised to be troublesome. “He has little to do, and little to live upon ; a poor education and no stability of character. Excitement is everything to him, and agitation provides a congenial and frequently a remunerative employment. The sufferings of Turkey and the atrocities of her enemies, coupled with the supposed indifference or hostility of the British Government, give him the text for fervid speeches at public meetings or in mosques, or for unbalanced newspaper articles which have a considerable effect on a comparatively illiterate audience.” Besides, there were the religious bigots — “who draw from the Turkish defeats a revival of his smouldering dislike of Christians and of the British ascendancy in India.” But over and above all, “the most powerful member of the combination” was “a group of energetic, clever, ambitious, sometimes personally embittered” leaders, who were at least partly of selfish motivation — “to become for a time the leaders themselves”. “By invective they beat down the attempts of the older fashioned, moderate but extremely sensitive leaders of the community to resist their domination. By racial grievances they hope to unite the Muhammadans in allegiance to themselves. By opposition to the Government they believe that they will eventually wring out concessions which will prove to their community that they, and not the loyalist, are the leaders who may profitably be followed.”

71. Ibid.

72. Home. Political. Progs. A. October 1913, No. 100-118, NAI.

At any rate the Cawnpore riot quickly became a national issue. S. A. Imam felt that the issue indeed had greater potentiality for trouble than any other since 1857. It was uniting the Muhammadans into a belief that their 'Deen' was in danger.⁷³

The populist bent of pan-Islamism was also worrying the Government of Bengal. True the Muhammadans in Bengal were keeping themselves within "reasonable limits" in as much as none of the top leaders were over-anxious to go directly against the State machinery. But the fact remained that the ordinary Muhammadan — "the man in the street" — "ill informed as to facts" — "is troubled by a vague religious sentiment that Muhammadan places of worship are in danger and that he has a duty to perform in the matter."⁷⁴ What was more important was that the position of the leadership in relation to the rank and file had undergone a change. Twenty years before, it was noted, the leaders were all Government servants and loyal. But the changing times meant that the old-style leaders like the Nawabs Ameer Ali, Abdul Lateef or Ameer Hossain — "will have very small following in these days. The leaders are now much more numerous than they used to be, and possess greater education and independence of character. Any leader who tried always to support Government will soon be discredited ..."⁷⁵

Besides, there were the educated classes. Cawnpore, Turkey and the undoing of Bengal partition were so many straws in the wind for them. "They generalise their inferences and say that Europeans in India have not the respect for the life of Indians that they ought to have."⁷⁶

The distrust was well illustrated in an episode which J. G. Cumming, the Chief Secretary of Bengal, reported to Government of India now. As we shall see, the fact that the incident was considered worth reporting was more indicative of the Bengal

73. Note by S. A. Imam, the Law Member, dated 2. 9. 13. Ibid.

74. Minute by Nawab S. Shamsul Huda, Member of the Bengal Executive Council, on the Muhammadan situation in Bengal. Political. Political. 1913. File No. 66 (6-8). Confidential WBSA.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

Government's anxiety than otherwise. Cumming thought "it showed that the nerves of the Muhammadans are upset and that they are prone to be querulous and fractious." It appears that the Eastern Bengal Railway wanted to demolish a house adjoining a mosque on a plot of land they had earlier acquired near the Sealdah station. There had been no protest when the acquisition occurred, but now it was reported that the land contained a graveyard, "and it was suggested" that Muhammadans who had nothing to do with the question might stage a protest. The railways were, in fact, asked by the Government to desist, "at present in view of the recent tension of feeling among Muhammadans by reason of the Cawnpore riot."⁷⁷

Cumming was on more solid grounds when he complained that official action in checking objectionable articles in the Muhammadan Press had led to the allegation that "the authorities have started a campaign against the Muhammadan Press."⁷⁸

A series of meetings had been held in Calcutta throughout August-September 1913 and prominent Muhammadans had participated in them. In April (1913), the Government had noted Fazlul Huq's statement: "Our quarrel is not with the Hindus, but with the officials... We are grateful to the Hindus... But it is the officials whose attitude is unforgivable, and we wish to settle our accounts with them."⁷⁹ And on 10th August the Moslem Defence Association had been set up followed by the founding of Cawnpore Mosque Defence Association on 7th September.⁸⁰

Official worry was compounded by the growing fraternization between Hindu Swadeshi leaders and Muslim elites. The importance of the Muhammadan crowd increased with the approaching War. The partition of Bengal had seen to the growth of the Muhammadan elite politician, who without a middle-class cadre comparable in any way to that of his Hindu counterpart had to draw upon the known turbulence of the lower class elements to register his power. This was, again, clearly reflected in the actions of the Hindu Swadeshi

77. From the Chief Secretary, GOB., to the Secretary, GOI., Home Department, 10th October 1913. Ibid.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid.

leaders, who recognised this growing importance and began to woo them. Some sort of a cooperation between the two groups of elite politicians, therefore, surfaced for a while. It is important to trace this process in order to understand the growing political involvement of the working poor in the ensuing years. These were the years which saw, the emergence of a more militant mass movement than ever before. And the essential human element required for this increasingly came from the poorer classes of the city and the mill areas around it. The urge towards pan-Islamism, which was far more hostile to the West than to anything else, was also more dependent upon lower classes for sustenance than any other contemporary ideology, Swadeshi, for instance, ever was. It can well be taken as having marked the beginning of a politics which saw the induction of the masses in the various movements around Calcutta. The whole process must have been helped also by the events in the interior, in Bihar and U.P., where the peasantry, both Hindu and Muhammadan, were about to exercise a new kind of political initiative.

The trend towards coalescence can be traced from as far back as at least the year 1907. In January Swadeshi leaders and the Bengal Muhammadan Association were issuing appeals, though separately, to Hindus and Muhammadans to abstain from quarrels during Bakr-Id.⁸¹ In the following month Hindu and Muhammadan speakers went in pairs to various districts. — “At all these places the speakers confined themselves to urging the use of indigenous goods and the avoidance of foreign goods, but the practice of sending out agitators in couples consisting of a Hindu and a Muhammadan is worthy of note.”⁸²

Even when the Swadeshi flush was receding, in late 1911, Surendranath Banerji was “making the fullest use of the Turko-Italian war to bring about Hindu-Muhammadan cooperation in agitation.” Officials specially noted a letter in Banerjee’s paper advising the Hindus to contribute to the funds of the Red Crescent Society and to sympathise with their Muslim brethren.⁸³ Hindu-

81. Fortnightly Report for the second half of January 1907. Home. Public. Progs. A. April 1907, No. 207-210. NAI.

82. Fortnightly Report for the second half of February 1907. Ibid.

83. Home. Political. Progs. B. January 1912. No. 121-123. NAI.

leaders were often seen at Muhammadan mass meetings. In early October 1912, at a meeting in the Federation Hall, a resolution on Persian affairs was moved by Maulavi Muhammad Akram Khan and seconded by Jitendra Lal Banerji. Similarly, in late October B. C. Pal, at a College Square meeting, expressed sympathy with Turkey "on the ground that Islam alone could establish true democracy, as it was the only democratic religion."⁸⁴ On November 10, B. C. Pal and Shyamsunder Chakraborty referred to the Balkan War in a meeting of 5000, more than half of whom seemed to be Muhammadans. A Muhammadan speaker explained the war as a case of Europe versus Asia, exhorting that Hindus and Muhammadans should unite to help Turkey as the Izzat of Asia was at stake. Chakraborty, the next speaker, said "that if they uttered the word boycott the cry of hatred was raised. But Europeans were showing their feelings of hatred and animosity towards Asiatics in every way."⁸⁵

Official anxiety was particularly marked by an awareness that it was not so much the religious element in the pan-Islamic ideology as hard, solid economic facts of day to day existence which would determine the outcome. In August 1914, therefore, it had been appreciated that "if the people at large remain prosperous, the effect of agitation will be much diminished; if they receive an access of prosperity, it will be neutralised; if, on the other hand, their prosperity should receive a set-back, the agitators will have a favourable field upon which to work." Left to themselves the masses would remain impassively loyal. It was also seen that the economic effects of the war could be so varied, and that the conditions and the temperaments of the masses differed so much, that it was unlikely that the economic impact would be uniform all over. The question of Turkey was always a sensitive one,⁸⁶ but then, the Muhammadan community itself was not homogeneous. "The North West Frontier Muhammadans generally, and those of the Western Punjab, have very little in common with what they call their darker

84. Home. Political. Progs. B. November 1912. No. 82-86. NAI.

85. Home. Political. Progs. B. December 1912. No. 88-91. NAI.

86. "Note regarding the internal position in India in the event of Great Britain being involved in war in Europe". By R. H. Craddock, dated August 1, 1914. Home. Political. Deposit August 1914, No. 1. NAI.

brethren down country ... The Eastern Bengal Muhammadans, again, dislike Aligarh. The Bombay Muhammadans, again, have little in common with the Muhammadans of the U. P.”⁸⁷

With the progress of the war certain aspects of the State's relationship with the Muhammadans gained in importance, emphasising the question of extra-territorial loyalty of the latter. In late August 1916, the Secretary of State, for instance, expressed his “profound shock” that the Indian Muslims prayed for the Sultan but offered no prayer “for their own Sovereign.”⁸⁸ In early September he again pointed out that under the British flag they were, in fact, the only community which habitually prayed for a foreign sovereign, in spite of the fact that Islam as a whole and the Indian Muslims in particular did not regard the Khalifa as their spiritual head.⁸⁹

This was followed by an enquiry by the Home Department which concluded that even though the Khalifa was not the formal head, the veneration of the Sultan was actually bound up with religious sentiments and political condition. It recalled that the only instances when the Muslims prayed for the King Emperor were the special services at the anniverseries of the war, when a guarded form of prayer was used, the congregation being asked to pray silently for him. For, to Muslims who were subjects of non-Islamic powers, “the Khalif is the true prince who is temporarily hindered in the exercise of his Government, but whose right is acknowledged by their unbelieving masters.” This feeling flowed directly from the fact of being dominated. So, Indian Muslims had to be more Ottoman than the Turks themselves. “It is an essential part of the Islamic tradition that the Moslems should rule. Indian Muhammadans living ... under the humiliating domination of Christians have accordingly comforted themselves with the spectacle of Turkey, the guardian of the Holy places, as strong and independent Arab power ruling over Christians as well as Moslems.” This particular state of faith had nothing to do with the actual state of affairs, “because

87. “Note regarding the internal position in India etc.” by H. Butler, dated 6.8.14. Ibid.

88. Home Political. Deposit. December 1916. File No. 30 & K.W. NAI.

89. Ibid.

their attitude is the result of a mixture of religious instinct and national sentiment.”⁹⁰

With the outbreak of the war, interesting rumours floated around lower down the social rung reflecting the beliefs and hopes of the urban poor. In January 1915, it was thus heard that a strong Japanese force had arrived to assist in the defence of India, and that German and Turkish forces were within three days' march of Kabul.⁹¹ By February, Government of Bengal would report that newspapers were disbelieved, and that it was strongly held that all Egypt had been captured with the help of the Sheikh of Tripoli.⁹² Shortly after this it was rumoured that allied forces had suffered crushing defeats and that though many Indian forces had been wounded only a few were allowed to return lest they should divulge the true state of affairs.⁹³ Again, it was said that Enver Bey had reached Kabul and had received the Amir's approval of a scheme for an invasion of India.⁹⁴

Official interest in the matter naturally increased after the war. The entire political situation grew more complicated than ever before and there was a militant popular movement in the offing. Marris, Secretary to Government of India, commented in May 1919, on the importance of Muhammadan attitude as a factor in the situation, particularly in view of the Turkish defeat and the subsequent peace terms. It was held that the common Muhammadan opinion anticipated that Britain would be generous towards defeated Turkey — “at the worst as a misguided opponent, and may indeed offer a return of (her) former friendship.” The actual peace terms would therefore be a “tremendous blow” and “it becomes of the highest importance to do whatever is possible beforehand to alleviate the shock and to discount its effects.” Already it was clear that the Ali brothers owed no allegiance to any power in war with Turkey. They had openly declared themselves to be enemies to the

90. From DuBoulay, Secretary, GOI., Home Department, to J. L. Maffey, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, D. O. dated 25th November 1916. Ibid.

91. Home. Political. Deposit. March 1915, No. 54 NAI.

92. Home. Political. Deposit. March 1915, No. 55 NAI.

93. Home. Political. Deposit. May 1915, No. 48 NAI.

94. Home. Political. Deposit. May 1915 No. 49 NAI.

Government, and "imply that if they had the strength to do so they would proclaim and lead a jihad ... Since they did not have the strength for that they can only perform hijrat and advise their co-religionists to do the like."⁹⁵

The views of the Government of Bengal at this juncture amply took into account the close connection between the Muhammadan immigrants' militancy in Bengal and the situation in the upcountry. The Burdwan Commissioner, for instance, emphasised the need to have early information on the attitude of the leading Maulavis of Patna, Gaya, Arrah and Chapra, "because we shall then know what to expect."⁹⁶ This was echoed by Kerr, the Chief Secretary, when he observed that the upcountry Muhammadan mill hands around Calcutta and the miners in the coalfields would be influenced by the Maulavis back home "in regard to their attitude towards the peace terms imposed upon Turkey."⁹⁷

What was perhaps more worrying to the Government was the evident lack of any divisive inclination. Moberly from Hooghly informed that a good deal of preaching was going on among the mill-hands in the Serampore Subdivision and that they had been secretly exhorted "to make common cause with the Marwaris and told that if all the castes and sects joined, it would be impossible for Government to deal with them".⁹⁸

It has to be appreciated that much of the official fear in this context seemed to be about the immigrant population than about the native Muhammadans. It was, for instance, observed by Hyde that "Bengal Muhammadans in the mufassal take little interest in Turkey and the Caliphate. Their whole interest is at the present moment in the high price of rice. If this could be reduced they will not be easily roused ; but if prices remain as they are, it will not be difficult for one or two leaders to rouse them." The mill areas, he thought, were a different proposition. It was more 'fanatical'. The Bengali Maulavis had no influence there, though, a word from

95. Political. Political. 1919. File No. 200 (1-59). Confidential. WBSA.

96. From Birley to Gupta. D. O. dated 15th May 1919. Ibid.

97. From the Chief Secretary, GOB., to the Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar and Orissa. D. O. dated 22nd May 1919. Ibid.

98. From Moberly to Kerr. 13th May, 1919. Ibid.

their own recognised Maulavis could carry them one way or the other.⁹⁹

Yet, we may note, that much of this fear about a fanatical, religions upsurge was plainly speculative. Nothing was happening in the mill area. An episode was related by Henderson from Howrah which brilliantly epitomised the position. The most important mosque in the area was one on Telkulghat Road, the Maulavi of which was a bitter enemy of one Ganpat who had a cowshed immediately opposite the mosque. "I had a lengthy interview with the Maulavi the other day. He showed no interest in this war, the fate of Turkey or anything, but his quarrels with Ganpat."¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

It should be clear from the above discussion, that communalism of the labouring poor, for the major part in our period, lacked definition and rigidity. Hindu-Muslim riots, as and when they occurred, were of short duration and often mixed up with other issues extraneous to communal beliefs or sentiments. If communal identity enjoined that a bond of sympathy should transcend class barriers, then, we have seen, that too was not operative at critical points.

What may be specially stressed is that overlying the Hindu-Muslim conflict was the realisation, particularly among pan-Islamists, that a greater conflict was due with the authorities. The rumours are specially suggestive in this regard. Partly, a reflection of how the popular mind interpreted contemporary events, the rumours also indicated the course which the popular mind wished events to take. In both these aspects, we have presence of elements which went beyond mere Hindu-Muslim antagonism.

To come back to the questions with which we started, it can now, perhaps, be posited that communal riots did not necessarily follow solely from any sense of identity with the community. Official ineptitude, tension within the power structure of the mill, co-existed

99. Note by R. B. Hyde, dated 18. 5. 1919. Ibid.

100. From Henderson to Kerr, dated 13th May, 1919. Ibid.

along with a threat from the authorities in several of the eruptions. Sometimes this perceived threat was realised in the actual communal behaviour of the law enforcement agencies. It can be argued that these factors went towards shaping the communal course of events. We do not need to reduce the labour to a puppet waiting for manipulation, to understand, that the context was determined for him and was not of his own creation. It can be shown that the misery of his slum life left him prone to violence, a proneness which was channelised at different times in different directions. On occasions other than those we have studied, the labour behaved, as violently, but for different ends.

From the 1920s, there was seemingly a greater political investment in communal sentiment. We begin to notice the presence of organised political parties in the structure of communal riots in Calcutta. No attempt has been made here to explain this shift, but works done by other scholars show that constitutional reforms, breakdown of the Congress-League pact, and the onset of the Depression (1929) all contributed to the shift. Yet it is noteworthy that even in this period we see instances when communal situations were defused through mutual understanding between the two communities. Again, it was in 1929, after all, that we have the first ever general strike in the jute mill industry, in which both Hindu and Muslim labour participated.

That the Government was aware of the potentially anti-Raj aspect of pan-Islamism is shown in the second part of our discussion. The Government might have been overreacting, as it was wont to do, sometimes, in matters of popular politics. But, as we have seen, in this case at least, there was ample reason for it to be apprehensive.

TEA GARDEN LABOUR MOVEMENT AND ENTRY OF
THE COMMUNISTS : A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
DARJEELING AND DOOARS GARDENS IN
BENGAL, 1937 - 1947.

NIRBAN BASU

I

In Bengal, the gardens producing tea, the principal plantation crop of India, are located mainly in the hill areas and the plains of Terai in the Darjeeling district and the Dooars in the Jalpaiguri district.

Tea production was experimentally started in the hills of Darjeeling in 1840, and in the plains of the district in 1862. The industry mostly under European control, rapidly grew since the 1860's. By 1947, the number of gardens rose to more than 60 in the hills and 17 in the plains. The acreage under tea was 47,422 and 16,899 respectively.¹

The tea growing area of the Jalpaiguri district, known as the Dooars in planting parlance, is situated in Bengal - Bhutan border area. After the Dooars had been annexed by the British from Bhutan at the close of the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864-'65, the tea planters of Darjeeling explored possibilities of growing tea there. Although the Dooars was the most unhealthy district in which malaria and black-water fever were rife, climatically it was most suitable to tea growing.² Soon, the Dooars became the largest tea-producing area in the province. British planters started the first tea garden in the Dooars in 1873. Within two years, the number of the gardens rose to thirteen. It did not remain an exclusively British enterprise. A few Bengali lawyers and clerks from Jalpaiguri formed

1. Indian Tea Association - Annual Report, 1947.

2. Griffiths, P. - *The History of the Indian Tea Industry* (1967) p. 115

the first Indian Tea Company called the Jalpaiguri Tea Co. with only one garden (1879). Since then, many more Indian-owned gardens were opened in the district. However, until the 1960's, the British Companies owned the majority of the gardens here.³ The growth of the tea industry in the Dooars in the 1880's was so rapid that the acreage under tea in 1892 was over six times that in 1881. During the period between 1901 and 1951, the area under tea nearly doubled and the labour force nearly trebled. By 1951, the number of gardens in the Dooars was 158 and the acreage under tea, 1,34,473 with a total labour force of 1,76,196.⁴

As the background of the working class movement in the plantation, two things are notable : (a) the organisation of the industry and (b) the composition of the labour force.

In order to look after their common interests, the tea planters formed the Indian Tea Association (May, 1881). It represented mainly the interests of British planters and tended to be one of the most powerful and well organised associations in the country. The I.T.A., with its headquarters in Calcutta, had its branches in the tea districts such as Dooars Planters' Association in the Dooars ; Darjeeling Planters Association in Darjeeling hills and Terai Planters' Association in the Terai. Subsequently, Indian planters formed another organisation, the Indian Tea Planters' Association (I.T.P.A.).

Thus tea planting was overwhelmingly dominated by Europeans, strongly united under the all-powerful monopsonistic body of the Indian Tea Association and its local branches. Moreover, the government always backed the management ostensibly, in the name of industrial peace. The real reasons for the special concern of the government for this industry were as follows : first, it was one of the major pillars of British capitalism in India, and secondly, tea, the principal plantation industry in India, had a crucial importance in the export trade. All these taken together, made for an almost

3. Bhowmik, Sharit - *Class Formation in the Plantation System* (New Delhi, 1981).

4. Mitra, A - *Census of India, 1951, Vol. VI, Pt. 1A* (West Bengal) Report (Cal, 1953) p, 253.

unlimited sway of the management over the labourers, bordering almost on tyranny.

The nature of composition of the tea labour force helped the management in this. In the Darjeeling hills, the immigrants or descendants of immigrants from the neighbouring country of Nepal constituted nearly the whole of the labour force. They might be regarded as a permanently settled population engaged in a hereditary occupation.

The composition of the labour force in the Terai region and in the Dooars was almost similar. The Dooars gardens, initially, employed the Nepali labourers from Darjeeling. But with the rapid increase of the industry they proved insufficient and the planters had to turn to Chota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas for labour supply. Migration of Santals, Oraos and Mundas to Jalpaiguri increased rapidly during the decades 1891 - 1911. But during the period 1911 - 1941, the ratio of the fresh immigrants in the total workforce decreased gradually.⁵ As the census of 1921 shows, of the total labour force employed in the Dooars, 90,348 were born in Chota Nagpur and 2,90,018 in Jalpaiguri and they too were mostly "Children of imported Coolies".⁶ Thus, a settled "alien" labour class had emerged. Since the late 20's new recruitment and migration diminished, partly because of the gradual development of the 'recruiting districts', and partly because of the availability of local labour from amongst the descendants of the settlers in the tea district. Thus since the 1930's we find in the Dooars, as in Assam, a heterogeneous but more or less fixed population of plantation labourers. Similarly in the plantations in the plains of the Terai region, the local agricultural labour formed the initial labour force. But with the rapid increase of tea cultivation since the 1880's excepting a few "meches" and some Nepalese (locally called paharias), a great number of whom were born on the tea-estates and might be regarded as indigenous, the aboriginal migrants from Chota Nagpur and Santhal Parganas and their descendants dominated the labour scene.

5. Mitra, A - *Ibid*, p. 264, Statement - 1 91.

6. Census of India, 1921, Vol. V. Pt. 1, p. 389.

As tea plantation is a semi-agricultural and semi-industrial process, generally everywhere the "family system" of production prevailed; men, women and even children worked in the gardens. The labourers were settled in the garden land and provided with residential plots and sometimes, also with small plots of agricultural land. Thus the workers tended to be tied down to a particular garden. The Sardars played an important role in the life of the workers. The labourers were recruited, engaged and looked after by the Sardars. The planters also wanted the Sardari system to continue because they believed that it was impossible for a manager to keep an eye upon individual workers.

Whatever might be the exact form of recruitment, in the Terai and the Dooars, the garden workers were reduced to a semi-servile status.⁷ The Labour Investigation Committee (1946) found⁸ that such a state of 'servility' prevailed even in the 1940's. Although the labourer was then legally free to leave his garden and seek employment in any garden of his liking, in practice it was seldom possible for him to move freely. Here was a mass of illiterate people, living far away from their original homes with which practically all relations had been cut off, scattered in tea gardens, segregated from outside influence, unorganised, and unable to protect themselves when the employers had formed themselves into one of the most powerful and organised associations in the country.

The implication of all this was that the large number of tea garden workers remained for long outside the orbit of a formal trade union organisation. They were almost cut off from the mainstream of the national political movement.

7. Dasgupta, Ranajit - "Structure of the Labour Market in Colonia India" (*Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number No. 1981).

Technically, the recruitment system in the Dooars was different from that in Assam in the sense that the labour in the Dooars was always "free", and a worker could leave whenever he pleased. But the fact was that though naked oppression was shunned by the Dooars planters, subtle forms were widely prevalent and formal contracts were not at all necessary in such situations.

8. *The Report of the Labour Investigation Committee on the Tea Garden Workers* (Henceforth as L.I. C).

II

In spite of the discontent of the tea labourers, there was no outward manifestation of organised labour agitation till the Non Co-operation Movement. The Darjeeling Planters' Association in their memorandum submitted to the Royal Commission on Labour (1929) observed⁹ with a sense of satisfaction that before the Non Co-operation Movement, industrial disputes were almost unknown in the district. If there was ever an occasional strike, it was almost confined to a single estate resulting from purely local and temporary issues and was generally very quickly settled. The same was the case in the Dooars.

During the Non Co-operation days (1920-21) "Swaraj" was in the air though few understood what it meant. In Darjeeling, Dal Bahadur Giri, a dismissed government servant and a local firebrand Congress leader of Kalimpong fomented agitation among the Gurkhas in the name of Gandhi. He popularised the slogan : uproot the tea plants and grow maize or paddy instead. Tea garden labour came to believe that British rule was soon to end and the hated tea garden managers would also go. They began to measure up tea gardens for dividing the cultivable lands among themselves.¹⁰ According to the government reports, the labour situation deteriorated sharply in the tea garden area, where the restraining influence exercised by indigenous capitalist interests on politicians was almost entirely lacking.¹¹ The tea planters alleged¹² that in 1921, paid agitators were sent by the Non-Co-operation organisation in Bengal with the specific object of stirring up the tea-workers against the managers and proprietors. The government reports, however, showed¹³ that only sporadic unrest, instigated by the

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9. *Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India* (1929)--Vol. VI, Pt. 1, p. 49 (Henceforth, R.C.L.I.)
 10. Majumdar, Satyendra Narayan - *Patabhumi Kanchanjungha* (Cal. 1983), p.16; also *Peoples' Age* - 2. 12. 1945.
 11. Govt. of Bengal, Political Department, Political Branch 56/1921, "Political situation in the Darjeeling District," vide Ray, R. K. - "Masses in Politics : The Non-Co-operation Movement in Bengal" (*Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Dec. 1974).
 12. R.C.L.I - Vol. VI Pt. 1, p. 49.
 13. Intelligence Branch, 1921 - Fortnightly Report of the Government of Bengal on the Political situation, 1921-22, quoted in R. K. Ray *Op. cit.*

Non-Co-operators, continued for sometime and although there were several strikes in July 1921 they were spontaneous and unorganised.

Similarly in the Dooars the Non-Co-operators had been quick to take advantage of the economic discontent of the coolies. They urged the coolies to take over the land and management themselves. Several strikes broke out. A widespread rumour to the effect that on a certain date, which was conveniently moved forward from time to time, a terrible storm would destroy all these who had not yet then declared for Gandhi, was in part responsible for these stoppages.¹⁴ Such prophecies were consistent with the cosmogonical belief system of the aboriginal tribes from which the Dooars plantation labour was drawn. The Intelligence Branch reported that¹⁵ labour unrest spread from the Darjeeling hill gardens further downhill in the Dooars in July, 1921 and latter on in the month of February, 1922, this unrest manifested itself in attempts to boycott tea garden *hats* (markets) in Jalpaiguri.

The movements, however, proved to be sporadic in nature in both Darjeeling and Dooars. A great deal was done to restore the confidence of the workers through some material concessions and propaganda undertaken by the garden managers. On the other hand, the Government relied on strong measures to contain the movement. In any case, the Non Co-operation Movements, even if vaguely, carried a message of freedom to the tea gardens, so long cut off from the outside world. But due to the lack of any organisational infrastructure no trade union movement, worth the name, grew out of this agitation.

III

Nothing happened for two decades or more. The Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-32, the political upheavals of 1937-39 which agitated the labourers in other parts of Bengal and

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14. GOB. Pol. Dept. Confidential/1924, F. No. S. C. 395/1924 – History of the Non Cooperation Movement and the Khilafat Agitation in Bengal (Printed Report).
 15. Intelligence Branch, 1921 – Fortnightly Reports of the Govt. of Bengal on the Political Situation, 1921-22.

Assam and the Quit India movement of 1942 could scarcely break "the peace" of the gardens. Neither was there any local initiative nor any serious outside attempt to mobilise the workers. It was the Communists who first organised the tea garden labour. Thus, from the very beginning, the labour movement here was closely connected with the Communist Party.

As a result of a steep rise in the prices of essential commodities during the World War II the discontent of tea workers naturally intensified, as elsewhere. There was no official living index number for Bengal during the war period. But it is generally held that the cost of living had gone up by 200 per cent between 1939 and 1945, whereas the labourers' total earnings including the cost of concessions had increased only by 100 per cent since 1939.¹⁶ The Indian Tea Association's declared policy of supplying the labour with foodstuffs and cloth at concessional rates was not always properly implemented.¹⁷ But inspite of such economic hardships, the agitation of the tea workers remained sporadic due to lack of any organisation.

The Communist organisation in the Darjeeling district started around 1943. Sometime in 1943, the Provincial Committee of the C.P.I. sent Sushil Chatterjee to organise a unit in the Darjeeling district which so long had none. A District Committee was formed in 1945 with G.L. Subba as Secretary. But the most important development was that, in the meantime, Sushil Chatterjee came in contact with Ratanlal Brahmain who had already become widely known among the poor tea garden labourers of Darjeeling as an unfailing friend and courageous fighter. Indeed, to his enemies, he was notorious as a 'dacoit Sardar'. Gradually but firmly, Ratanlal came over to the C.P.I. through the Campaign for cheap-grain shops and rationing while the famine was raging (1943-44) and became the Party's leading light.¹⁸

Radical ideas started to infiltrate the Jalpaiguri district sometime during 1938-39 when a small District committee of the then illegal

16. Report of the *L. I. C.* - p. 76.

17. *Ibid* - p. 89.

18. *Peoples' Age* - 2. 12. 45.

C.P.I. working under the banner of the Congress Socialist Party was formed. But compared to the work among the peasants, trade union work among the tea workers at the time was not considerable. Even during the Second World War, after the C.P.I. had been legalised, the Communists could not penetrate the tea gardens to any appreciable extent. At this stage, their attention was concentrated mainly on the railway labour.¹⁹ The D.P.A. reported to the Labour Investigation Committee (1946) that there were only two small strikes in the last five years.²⁰

IV

The proposed election to the Provincial Assembly in March, 1946, offered an ideal opportunity to the Communists to extend their base throughout the tea gardens of the Darjeeling district. According to the provision of the Provincial Legislative Assemblies Election Order, the garden constituencies were of a shifting nature. In the first election of 1937, the garden labour seat was constituted by the Bengal Dooars (Western) constituency. The mass of the tea garden workers did not have the right to vote. Due to absence of any kind of organisation, neither the National Congress nor the Trade Union Congress, could sponsor any candidate for this seat. Sardar Babu Litta Munda Orao (Independent), backed by the white bosses, was elected unopposed. He cut a poor figure in the Assembly, hardly spoke, never raised the issue of the oppressed tea garden labour and generally sided with the Europeans.

Entry of the Communists in Darjeeling.

In 1946, the tea labour seat was constituted by the Darjeeling (Sadar) constituency. In the area of about 100 gardens, only 12 of the smallest gardens were grouped together to make the labour constituency, there were only 2,500 voters in a constituency which had an adult population of nearly 18,000. But in spite of all limitations, the Communists took the election as an opportunity for a wider movement and started work in right earnest.

19. Dasgupta, Ranajit, — *Nationalist and Left Movements in Bengal: Jalpaiguri 1905-47* (unpublished Mss).

20 Report of the L. I. C. — p. 96.

The Communists began with the formation of a Central Trade Union ; the individual garden units were formed later. The first trade union in the Darjeeling district, known as the Darjeeling District Chiya Kaman (Tea Garden) Workers' union, close linked with the C.P.I., appears to have come into being sometime in 1945, although the exact details are not available. But the reports relating to the composition of the office-bearers of the Union in its second year (1946-47) show²¹ that most of the office-bearers were the whole-timers of the C.P.I., while only two Vice-Presidents were actual tea-garden workers. Nevertheless, for the first time in the long history of the tyrannical rule of the white plantation kings over the workers, the Communists had begun to awaken the garden labour to a sense of their elementary human rights.

In October 1945 it was announced that Ratanlal Brahmin would, as the Communist candidate, contest the tea garden seat in the ensuing election. This decision unnerved the planters, the government and the Congress. The Congress, having till then little organisation among the tea labourers, soon came to be backed by the planters, and, assisted by local officials, desperately sought to prevent any contact between the tea garden labour and the Communists. On the other hand, the planters brought both the anti-Communist candidates, one from the Congress and the other Independent, right inside their gardens, arranged election meetings and ordered their workers to vote for either of them, but never for the Communists.²² The Congress came to an understanding also with Gorkha League to the effect that the Congress would support the Gorkha League nominee for the Darjeeling General seat, who would join the Congress Parliamentary Party inside the Assembly ; and that in return, the Gorkha League would support the Congress candidate in the labour seat.

Although the Communists were banned from entering the gardens, they clandestinely contacted the labourers, distributed various leaflets among them, endeavoured to call the coolies away from their work and delivered political speeches. At this, the Secretary of the

21. Intelligence Branch, Weekly Confidential Report, Darjeeling dt. 6. 7. 46 (Henceforth as W. C. R.)

22. *Peoples' Age* - 2. 12. 45.

Darjeeling Planters' Association, apprehending breach of peace, sought the help of the police in the vicinity of the gardens.²³ Repression made it difficult for the Communists to hold huge rallies. The Communist propaganda²⁴ mainly concentrated on the wretched condition of the coolies and the oppression by the Managers, and appealed to the workers to vote for the Communist candidate. At the same time, they criticised the Congress for creating division in the ranks of the workers and stressed the need for unity among all sections of the workers. The electioneering soon created signs of tensions in different areas. In a letter addressed to the Darjeeling Committee of the C.P.I. explaining the ban on the entry of the Communists into his garden, Smyth Osborne, Manager of the Soom T.E., succinctly put the British planters' point of view.²⁵ In the first place, he argued that he could not provide facilities on the garden property to assist the Communists in their avowed aim of "taking that property away from its rightful owners." Secondly, he held that there was a lot of opposition from among the tea garden workers themselves to the activities of the Communists.

But in spite of all obstacles thus created by the insolent white bosses and the Congress leadership, Ratanlal won the election, while both of his rivals, the Congress and independent candidates, backed by the British planters, lost their deposits.²⁶ This landslide victory of the Communist candidate in the face of strong anti-Communist wave which swept almost all other labour constituencies deserves an explanation. This victory has been attributed partly to the organisational skill of the Communists and to a much greater extent to the personal popularity of Ratanlal. As a result, the Communists succeeded, to a large extent, in countering the "white terror" on the day of the election. It has, however, been admitted later by the Communists themselves²⁷ that it was wrong to attribute the election victory solely to the strength of the Communist organisation among the workers.

23. I. B., W. C. R. - 9. 3. 46.

24. I. B., W. C. R. - 16. 3. 46.

25. *People's Age* - 31. 3. 46.

26. *A. B. Patrika* - 26.3.46; Ratanlal Brahmin, (C. P. I.) - 1, 118; S. K. Chirring (Independent) - 126; *Gaga Tshering* (Congress) - 76.

27. Majumdar S. N. - *op. cit.* p. 31.

The Post-Election Developments (March - June, 1946)

The election victory encouraged the Communists to think of channelizing the spontaneous enthusiasm of the tea workers toward strengthening the Central Chiya Kaman Union through formation of branches in every garden. Certain basic points stand out from the Communist propaganda : criticism of the Congress workers for their anti-Communist activities ; condemnation of the garden authorities for curbing the democratic rights of the workers ; demand of ration and increased wages for the labourers ; the threat of a strike in case of non-fulfilment of their demands ; and stress on unity and co-operation among the workers.²⁸

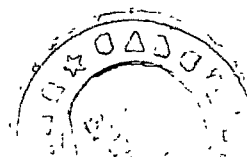
Troubles greatly increased in the Darjeeling gardens since the election of Ratanlal. Hell had been let loose on the garden workers by the management for flouting its will and electing a Communist. Immediately after the elections, owners of ten gardens filed cases against the local Communists and trade union organisers. Workers were dismissed from almost every garden on the slightest suspicion that they were connected with the Workers' Union. In certain tea gardens, bosses stopped supplying all food rations to force the starving workers to leave their union.²⁹ The repressions had little effect on the hardcore Communists and their followers. In April, 1946, the President of the Darjeeling Planters' Association noted that the Communist Party had a firm footing on many gardens and had been gaining ground.³⁰

In the following months of 1946-47, Darjeeling gardens witnessed an intense labour agitation by the Communists. The aims of the C.P.I. were two fold : Firstly, in the gardens where the labourers became agitated over some immediate issues, the Communist quickly took up the issues, organised group meetings, fomented strikes and tried to form a local garden unit. Secondly, in the gardens where the labourers had not yet shown any great discontent, the Communists sent volunteers from the neighbouring gardens and tried to make contact with the labourers through leaflets and group meetings

28. I.B., W. C. R. - 6. 4. 46.

29. *Peoples' Age* - 12. 6. 46.

30. Griffiths, Percival - *The History of the Indian Tea Industry* (1967) p. 390.



highlighting their success in the neighbouring gardens and sought to arouse their interest. Satyen Majumdar, 'a prominent and active C.P.I. participant in the movement of that time'³¹, observed later that the workers spontaneously took resort to strikes or other forms of agitation against 'Hatabahar' (forcible eviction), ration-cuts, police oppression etc., and that there was no clear-cut programme of the Union leadership beforehand.

There were a number of strikes during May and June 1946 in the gardens of the Darjeeling Sadar and Kurseong sub-divisions. The Communist strategy in regard to these sporadic labour agitations was pretty clear. Even the Indian Tea Association admitted that there was lack of uniformity in wages and other forms of remuneration and that the "independent tradition" of gardens still lingered. It was, therefore, easy for the Communists to adopt the strategy of concentrating on those gardens where conditions seemed less favourable than on neighbouring gardens and then, to use instances of their success in extracting concessions from the management. They used this technique with considerable skill and then attempted it on a greater scale.³² Satyen Majumdar puts forward a different view.³³ According to him, in the face of the repression launched by the management and the police, the sporadic resistance and agitation of the tea workers in most of the cases had little chances of success. This factor adversely affected the newly founded Chia Kaman Workers' Union. Under these circumstances, the only way out of the impasse was to take the strategy of an all-out offensive. The Provincial Committee of the C.P.I. sent the veteran Communist leader Panchu Gopal Bhaduri to assist the District Committee in formulating a correct political line. At his advice, a two-pronged programme was chalked out : to give notice for a general strike in the tea gardens on behalf of the union ; and to carry on propaganda soliciting the support of urban Nepali middle class and intelligentsia and also other political parties including the Congress and the Gorkha League for the tea labour's cause. The time purposely chosen for these agitations was June-July, known as the time of

31. Majumdar, S. N. - *op. cit.*, p. 38.

32. I. T. A. Annual Report for the year ending 1946. pp. 40-41.

33. Majumdar, S. N. - *Op. cit.* pp. 40-41.

Hulapatti (plucking of leaves in large quantities) in the tea parlance which would force the management to come to a speedy settlement.

On June 3, a representation on behalf of the C.P.I. met the Labour Commissioner, Bengal demanding among other things, immediate withdrawal of the police force from different gardens ; regular supply of a fixed quantity of rice at controlled rates to every worker ; withdrawal of the order under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code, and all other court cases. At the request of the Labour Commissioner, they agreed to allow some more time to the management to consider these demands.³⁴ But as no follow-up action was taken, on June 15, the Chiya Kaman Workers' Union served strike notices on the management of 17 Tea Estates and also submitted a representation to the Minister of Labour, Bengal. The 12-point Demand Charter Included³⁵ demands for increase in wage rates ; Dearness Allowance of 25 per cent ; fixation of a minimum pay ; leave facilities ; improvement in the working conditions ; and recognition of the Chiya Kaman Workers' Union.

At a meeting of the tea garden labourers held in Darjeeling on June 19, the union publicly announced its decision to go on a general strike if the demands were not fulfilled within the stipulated period.³⁶ At this time, the C.P.I. sought the support of the Congress and the Gorkha League. Any adjustment with the Gorkha League, however, was very difficult because of the bitter personal animosity between the Nepali Communist leaders like R. L. Brahmin and G. L. Subba, who were previously connected with the Gorkha League and the present League leadership. On behalf of the District C.P.I. Committee, Satyen Majumdar carried on negotiations and persuaded the Gurkha League leadership to protest against the repression by the police and the management, although not jointly with the Communists. Accordingly, Shib Kumar Rai, General Secretary, A.I.G.L., in a statement called upon the workers to fight against British planters and the bureaucracy. Lagpa Tshering, Secretary of the Darjeeling Sadar Sub Divisional Congress Committee, also

34. *Swadhinata*—1, 6. 46.

35. *Amrita Bazar Patrika*—20. 6. 46.

36. I. B., Bengal Police Abstract—29. 6. 46.

issued a statement urging the C.P.I., Congress and Gorkha League to compose their political differences and to support unitedly the demands of tea-workers. Although these were mainly of a token value their importance at that point of time was enormous.⁷

At this stage, the government actively took up the whole question of tea labour and seriously attempted to prevent the workers from going on strike from July, 1. That there was also a difference between the public posture of the C.P.I. and its immediate aims is evident from the extracts of a letter written on June 18 by Sushil Chatterjee from the Calcutta Party Office to G. L. Subba, Secretary, Darjeeling District C.P.I. :⁸⁸ "Just coming from the conference with the Minister, Labour Commissioner etc., ... The Minister is in our favour but don't know what will be done finally ... I have asked them to take immediate action on these points : (1) Stopping victimisation and reappointment of the victimised ; (2) Rice ; (3) Postponment of cases ; (4) Allowing us to enter the gardens. They say, it will take time to have final decisions. Our point is that provided they agree on the said four points, we can postpone the strike for the time being."

On the occasion of the first annual conference of the Chiya Kaman Workers' Union a public meeting was held in Darjeeling on June 30, with Dharani Goswami, a veteran C.P.I. leader from Calcutta, in the chair. There Sushil Chatterjee told the workers of the request to them from the Labour Commissioner and the Minister during the recent negotiation in Calcutta not to resort to strike but to wait for two months. He accordingly asked the labourers to postpone the strike due to have started on from July 1, 1946 till further instructions from the C.P.I. Later, the Chiya Kaman Workers' Union agreed to withdraw the strike notice.⁸⁹

The only concession which the union gained was the promise of the management to recognise the trade union rights to a limited extent, which meant that no workers would be victimised just for being a member of any registered union and that no hindrance to

37. Majmdar, S. N. — *op. cit.*, p. 42.

38. District I. B., C. I. D, Darjeeling No. 2429/7-46 (Int).

39. I. B., W. C. R. — 6. 7. 46.

the normal activities of the trade union would be created. Moreover, in its Annual Report the Darjeeling Planters' Association mentioned that it intended to standardise labour conditions as far as possible throughout the whole district and submitted to the Labour Commissioner⁴⁰ a detailed memorandum in this regard. But all other demands including such important ones as wage increase and abolition of *hatabahar* were summarily rejected.

Satyen Majumdar observes⁴¹ that the Communists had not the sufficient strength at that time to conduct a general strike. What the union gained was that the tyranny of the management and police diminished to a certain degree and that the union thus got respite for some time. Whatever might be material result of the negotiations, their political significance was notable. This was the first organised united struggle of the tea workers in the hills and its impact was far-reaching. In spite of temporary setbacks, the workers had not surrendered unconditionally. Rather they were animated by a new sense of strength and self-respect.

Challenges to the Communists from Rival Parties in Darjeeling (July - December 1946)

The position of the Communists among the Darjeeling tea labourers, however, did not remain unchanged for long. Soon, they had to cope with the challenges from the Congress and Gorkha League.

In its attempts to extend its influence among tea garden labour the Congress also faced certain difficulties. There were certain progressive elements within the Congress who realised the need for organising tea labourers, but the planters would not spare even them. The local police formed an impression that the willing Congress organisers could not win over any significant section of the garden labour.⁴² The I.T.A. Report of 1947 stated⁴³ : "Little constructive

40. I. T. A. Report for 1946 - pp. 40-41.

41. Majumdar S. N. - *op. cit.*, p. 43.

42. I. B. File No. 586/46:- The note of the S. P., D. I. B., C. I. D., Darjeeling to S. S., I. B., C. I. D., Cal. dt. 27. 6. 46.

43. I. T. A., Report for 1947, p. 43.

work was carried by the Congress and by the I.N.T.U.C. among the tea garden labour in Bengal during 1947, and prior to December last the only serious efforts to organise labour union came from the Gorkha League and the Communist Party." So, continually harassed by the Communists, most Darjeeling planters were only too ready to look favourably on the Gorkha League expecting that it could counter the Communist influence.

The Gorkha League⁴⁴ formed a Labour Front known as the Darjeeling Chiya Kaman Sramik Sangha. Its primary concern seems to have been to outbid the Communists in their extravagant demands. Yet, in the absence of any third alternative, "the planters had to make the best of a bad job."⁴⁵

From the beginning, the Gorkha League leaders was unsympathetic towards the Communist-led tea workers' movement, mainly for two reasons.⁴⁶ First, to them the movement seemed to be a challenge to their influence. They branded the C.P.I. as an agent of the Bengalis. The fact that two of the main organisers of the union (Sushil Chatterjee and Satyen Majumdar) were Bengalis made

44. In the late 1920's, the Hillmen's Association was formed in Darjeeling, allegedly at the instigation of the government, to foment the anti-plainmen feeling of the Gurkhas. Since the mid — 30's, with the emergence of an educated middle class among the Gurkhas, there was a growing feeling of Nepalese subnationalism. The establishment of "Nepali Sahitya Sammelan" showed the newly found love of the Gurkhas for their language, literature, culture and antiquity. Then the "Gurkha Dukh Nibaran Sammelan" was established to ameliorate the sufferings of the toiling Gurkha masses. Then the All India Gorkha League came into being in the mid-40's as a direct offshoot of the newly rising spirit of sub-nationalism among the Gurkhas. The mass upsurge all over India at the end of the World War II coupled with the return of a large number of Gurkhas from the war fields injected into their movement a new kind of militancy. But the British capitalists and the bureaucracy very shrewdly sought to channelise the newly rising national spirit of the Gurkhas into chauvinistic lines so that no united mass movement could grow against British Government and capital. However, in spite of the considerable appeal of the Gurkha League Leadership over a section of the Gurkha masses, initially it had little organisational hold over the tea garden labourers.

45. Griffiths — *op. cit.*, p. 390.

46. Majumdar S. N. — *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

this accusation look credible. Secondly, much more important was the fact that the clerks and Sirdars of various tea gardens were, in general, supporters of the Gorkha League. They had to act as intermediaries between the white planters and managers on the one hand, and the workers on the other. Naturally the workers looked upon them as the planters' instrument of oppression. So, in the initial stage of the agitation, they had to face the spontaneous wrath of the workers, so that the community of intermediaries were becoming increasingly anti-Communist.

The growth of the Gorkha League unions led to increasing tension between the G.L. and the C.P.I. The activities of the G.L. during this phase were not without significance. It seems that the G.L., whose initial aim in the labour field was to contain the Communist influence, became willy nilly involved in the actual struggle of the tea workers. A typical illustration of this was the incident in the Teesta Valley T.E.⁴⁷, where a branch of the Tea Garden Labour Union of the G.L. had been formed in September, 1946. On September 10, the police arrested five coolies of the garden who were named by the Manager in the First Information Report filed in connection with a recent rioting case. The entire labour force surrounded the Manager's bungalow. When they refused to disperse in spite of repeated warnings, the police opened fire injuring two labourers. This created a great sensation. At a public meeting organised by the G.L. on September 12, the speakers strongly condemned the police firing, demanded an immediate public non-official enquiry but at the same time advised the workers to resume work by September 14. On the same day at a separate meeting organised by the C.P.I., the speakers condemned the police action in strong terms, called for launching a war to annihilate "the police and the Capitalist Raj", criticised the way the G.L. leadership worked and appealed to the members of the G.L. to work in co-operation with the C.P.I. in defence of the tea garden labour. The G.L. leadership, however, was not ready to come to any adjustment with the Communists. What was really crucial for the labour movement was the striking difference in the approaches of the G.L. and the C.P.I. The former was always in favour of a

47. I. B., W. C. R. — 21. 9. 46

speedy settlement of disputes ; the latter tried to make the agitations more militant and prolonged.

It is, however, wrong to think that the Communists remained silent onlookers since the withdrawal of the call of a general strike (June, 1946) while other parties like the Gorkha League or Congress had been trying to infiltrate tea garden labour organisations. Throughout the period, Communists tried to retain and widen their base among the tea workers. They organised a number of meetings to criticise the planters and expose the Gorkha League and fomented strikes, wherever possible, mostly on grievances connected with dismissal of coolies and supply of rations.⁴⁸ However, the extent of the Communist success was limited.

Reviewing the period since the withdrawal of the call of a general strike (June, 1946), Satyen Majumdar in his memoirs has pointed out⁴⁹ that in spite of certain sporadic movements under the Communist leadership and its success in some cases the C.P.I. failed to consolidate its position with a clear-cut programme. There were new dimensions in the planters' offensive, such as appointment of watchmen or volunteer force to put a check on the activities of the union workers and formation of parallel unions. Most of the strikes were in protest against dismissals and cut in rations. In their speeches, the C.P.I. leaders often protested against such measures of the management but in practice they could not appreciably counter them. Majumdar has referred in this connection to the sinister propaganda carried on by anti-Communist elements among the workers of tea gardens scattered in remote areas which endangered the very existence of the Workers' Union. In fact, the Communist organisers had to leave the field for some time. The prolonged absence of Ratanlal Brahmin from Darjeeling due to his preoccupation with party work in other parts of Bengal added further credence to this propaganda. To counteract this propaganda, the need for organising central rallies was urgently felt. The importance of two rallies in Darjeeling and Kurseong, on October 12 and 13 respectively, is to be judged in this context. These meetings

48. I. B. , B. P. A. — 6. 7. 46, 28. 7. 46 ; 10. 8. 46 ; I. B., W. C. R. — 7. 9. 46 ; 24. 8. 46 ; 12. 10. 46 ; 19. 10. 46 ; 2. 11. 46.

49. Majumdar S. N. — *Op cit.* pp. 59-60.

were addressed by Ratanlal Brahmin, Bhadra Bahadur Hamal, Sushil Chatterjee and Jyoti Basu, then leader of the C.P.I. group in the Bengal Assembly, and other prominent labour leaders.

Another significant development since the end of this period was that the Communists for the first time turned their attention to the plains of the Darjeeling District.⁵⁰ The composition of the labour force in the plains was different from that in the hills. While in the latter, the labour force was wholly Nepali, the labour in the plains was by and large, aboriginal tribals. The local Communist workers in the plains, mostly Bengalis, actively participated in the prolonged labour agitation in the Gangaram T. E. (P.S. Siliguri) which started in October, 1946. But the management took an inflexible attitude.

V

While in Darjeeling, the Communists did the initial ground work in the trade union organisation among the tea workers during the later years of the World War II, in the Dooars, the process began only after the end of the World War. And only by the middle of 1946 were there first visible signs of movement among the Dooars workers. Incidentally, in Darjeeling, by this time, after the victory of the Communist candidate in the Assembly election there was widespread agitation leading to the call of a general strike.

Entry of the Communists in the Dooars :

In the immediate post-war period, the economic conditions of the tea workers considerably worsened due to price rise and scarcity of essential commodities. Side by side, the availability of alternative and more paying employments provided by road construction projects helped to strengthen the bargaining power of tea labourers. In such an economic background the overall political development in the country as a whole and the political agitations taking place in the district, began to affect the tea garden labour. Through various channels information, even if vague, about the momentous political

50. 1. B., W.C.R. — 19. 10. 46 ; 2. 11. 46 ; 14. 12. 46 ; I.B., B.P.A. — 2. 11. 46.

developments taking place in the country must have reached them. The 1946 election Campaign on behalf of the two Communist candidates in the neighbouring areas, the Darjeeling tea labour and Jalpaiguri Rural Scheduled Reserved Constituencies, for the first time carried the message of the Red Flag to the tea garden labour in the sprawling tea-belt of the Dooars and particularly affected the workers of the gardens situated near a large market centre like Mal.⁵¹

The most important role in organising the movement among the Dooars Tea garden workers was played by the trade union organisers of the Bengal Assam Railroad Workers' Union (B.A.R.R.W.U). It was a non-political union but most of its whole-time organisers were Communists. Their work was facilitated by the fact that the railway lines of the Bengal Dooars Railway passed by or even through the gardens, that the big railway stations had around them several tea gardens and that the lowest ranking railway workers — the unionized gangmen and pointsmen — came into frequent contacts with the sprawling labour population. The fact that many of the gang Khalasis and pointsmen themselves were tribals also helped the organizers.

Deba Prasad Ghosh (popularly known as Patal Babu), who was for quite some time engaged as a full-time functionary and organiser of the local Railway Union and some other union cadres such as Lalbahadur Chetri, Budhan Singh and Man Singh, took the initiative in organising the tea garden labour. The pioneer organisers, however, had to work in a clandestine fashion and often under the cover of darkness of night.⁵² As the cooly-lines and most of the roads and pathways passing through the tea gardens belonged to the owner's private property, contacting the labour openly within tea gardens was out of question. The organisers would be arrested or even shot as trespassers by the management. Initial contacts and group meetings had to be held on railway lines, in a dark corner of railway platforms or in the gangmen's quarters. Haihaipathar, the first garden to be organised in this way, was situated near the Mal Railway Station.

51. Dasgupta Ranajit — *Op. cit.*

52. Bhowmik, S. — *Op. cit.*

By the middle of 1946, Communist trade unionists were able to stir up unrest in several gardens as the employers did not supply the workers with their quota of food rations. Among others, Jagannath Oraon, Feguram Oraon and Lawrence Sukhdeo, all working in the Haihaipathar tea garden, responded enthusiastically to such attempts by the outsiders, and took the lead in organising their fellow-workers.⁵³ The unrest among the tea workers was, however, attributed by the planters to 'outside agitators' 'exploiting' the workers for their political gains.⁵⁴

Sometime in the latter part of 1946, the first central trade union of the tea garden workers of Jalpaiguri was formed. This was the Jalpaiguri Zilla Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union, with its headquarters at Mal with Ratanlal Brahmin, the C.P.I. M.L.A. elected from Darjeeling, as President and Debaprasad (alias Patal) Ghosh as General Secretary. In the meantime, several new gardens — Soon-gachi and Toonbari near Mal ; Lakhipara, Red Bank Dalpara and Diana near Banarhat, another important railway centre, and Dengujhar near Jalpaiguri town had come under the influence of the Communist Union. The very propaganda of the oppressive management against the Communists encouraged the labour to establish contacts with the Red Flag Union. Slogans such as *Hamara Mung Dena Hoga* (our demand must be met) ; *Belati Malik London Bhago* (British owners, go back to London) ; *Inquilab Zindabad* (Long Live Revolution) were raised by the workers in meetings and demonstrations. The mood of labourers at the time was one of revolt. This often found expression in a spontaneous and sporadic fashion in the form of gheraos, sudden work stoppages, violent incidents, occasional beatings of babus notorious for corruption and espionage for the Shahib.⁵⁵

The fortnightly reports in July and August, 1946 repeatedly mentioned⁵⁶ signs of trouble in some of the Dooars gardens due to the attempts of the Communists to organise units, although no

53. Dasgupta, Ranajit — *Op. cit.*

54. Annual Report of the I. I. P. A. (1946)

55. Dasgupta, Ranajit — *Op. cit.*

56. F. R., Bengal — July, 1st Half, 2nd Half ; August, 1st Half, 2nd Half, 1946.

organised movement on a large scale occurred at that time. In July, two strikes were reported, in one of which the labourers made an organised attempt to cut off the garden from the outside world and to damage the factory machinery. Their efforts were, however, frustrated by the arrival of the police. By September, the situation gradually took a serious turn. While reporting on the unrest, rioting and strikes continuing on three different gardens in Jalpaiguri the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division emphasised that the whole problem of the tea garden labour required the careful attention of the Labour Commissioner. At the moment, he admitted, there was no uniformity of service conditions, with each garden management pursuing its own policy and allegations of corruption against senior garden employees were frequent. In fact, as the Commissioner found, such grievances were being effectively used by the agitators.⁵⁷

At this stage, some Congressmen of Alipurduar also came forward to organise unions in that area and for that purpose sought permission to hold mass meetings in October, 1946. But the local S.D.O. considered the situation delicate and banned the meetings u/s 144 Cr. P.C.⁵⁸ Soon, in the first half of November, serious troubles broke out in nine Tea Estates managed by Shaw Wallace & Co. in the Alipurduar Subdivision, as a result of a cut in the rice-part of the food ration necessitated by a shortage of stock. The stoppage of work in each case was of short duration, but violence was used by the labourers, the particular targets being the houses and property of the Bengali clerical staff and the shops of some Marwari Garden shop-keepers. The situation became quiet after November 13.⁵⁹ But the Rajshahi Divisional Commissioner predicted the possibility of further trouble in the Dooars owing to the fact that the rations for the tea garden labour were not satisfactory.⁶⁰ During the same period, there had been renewed agitation in other parts of the district led by the C.P.I. following the expulsion of some workers, allegedly implicated in the recent disturbances.⁶¹

57. F. R. Bengal — September, 2nd Half, 1946.

58. F. R. Bengal — October, 2nd Half, 1946.

59. F. R. Bengal — November, 1st Half, and 2nd Half, 1946.

60. F. R. Bengal — December, 1st Half, 1946.

61. F. R. Bengal — November, 1st Half, 1946.

In December, 1946, a memorandum containing demands for wage-increase, better housing conditions, improved medical facilities and introduction of general welfare measures for the tea garden workers was submitted by the Jalpaiguri Zilla Tea Garden Workers' Union to the Labour Commissioner, Bengal. The matter was referred to the I.T.P.A. and the D.P.A.⁶² The Executive Committee of the I.T.P.A. in its meeting on December 3, 1946 decided to look into the matter. At the same time, the Association discussed the feasibility of the formation of "employer-sponsored unions."⁶³

Labour unrest was the recurring theme in the speeches of the Chairman of both the I.T.P.A. and D.P.A. and of the Commissioner of the Rajshahi Division at the Annual General Meeting of the I.T.P.A. for the year 1946. They blamed the political parties who were 'exploiting' the labour. The Commissioner thought this unrest was quite natural in the present circumstances because political parties realised that they could make capital out of the workers' discontent. He suggested that trade unions which were "well run", should be encouraged. But the planters, irrespective of their race, overlooked the fact that there might be genuine reasons for labour discontent and stressed only the role of the Communist organisers in the unrest.⁶⁴

Thus while Darjeeling, a traditional Communist base for the last few years, witnessed a temporary decline in the Communist activities in the second half of 1946, atleast compared to the first half, the Dooars, where the tea workers' movement had a late start, became a hot bed of agitation in the closing months of 1946.

VI

The Tripartite Conference (Jan. 1947) and Its Aftermath :

The continuous labour unrest in the tea gardens in different parts of India eventually forced the Central Government not to regard

62. Annual Report of the I. T. P. A , 1946 ; p. 104 ; Annual Report of the DPA, 1947 ; p. 105 — Appendix — B.

63. Annual Report of the I, T. P. A., 1946: p. 104.

64. Ibid — pp 14-15, 44.

labour disputes merely as a problem of law and order to be tackled by the police ; and to take some uniform economic measures. To discuss the problems of tea labour in general, the Interim Government convened on January 8-9, 1947, a Tripartite Conference in New Delhi, representing the employees, employers and the Government with six members from each side. At the tripartite Conference the following demands were accepted :⁶⁵ The wages would increase from 6 As to 8 As per day with 2 As. more given as D.A. and there would be some reduction in the price of rice and other rationed articles. This system would continue for three to four months. Within this period a Select Committee would consider the feasibility of fixing the daily wage at the rate of Rs. 1-4-0 for male and Rs. 1-0-0 for female in consultation with the representatives of the employers and the employees. The planters also agreed to construct cooli-sheds and to provide medical arrangement and maternity allowance.

The C.P.I. naturally regarded the Tripartite Conference as the high-water mark of its success. In a Nepali leaflet, it said⁶⁶ ... "The Tripartite Conference which was held was solely due to the activities of the Mazdoors guided by the C.P.I. ... Now it is the first duty of the Mazdoors to strengthen the union ... with no fear of the planters and to establish your rights." But the Communist version of the terms of settlement differed from that of the management. While the management understood that the Select Committee would consider the feasibility of increasing rates of wages, the Communists asserted that the Committee would outright increase the wages. This initially created great enthusiasm among the workers. But the Communists were soon to be disappointed because of the non-fulfilment of the promises they claimed to have been made at the Tripartite Conference.

At the 22nd Conference of the All India Trade Union Congress (Calcutta, February, 1947), then dominated by the Communists, a resolution about plantation workers was adopted demanding :⁶⁷ a minimum daily wage of Rs. 1-4 for men and women alike ; non-increase of 'Nirikh' or per capita quota of work ; abolition of child-

65. *Swadhinata* — 8. 1. 47.

66. I. B. Records : Nepali Pamphlet issued by the C. P. I. March, 1947.

67. Report of the A. I. T. U. C., 22nd Session (Calcutta, Feb, 1947).

labour ; supply of adequate rations to all the family members of the workers at concession rates ; supply of cloth to workers at controlled rates ; provision of adequate housing accomodation ; free and compulsory education for all the children of plantation workers under the direct control of Government. The proposals, however, received little attention from either the management or the government.

But, labour unrest went on increasing both in Darjeeling and the Dooars, as the expectations raised in the Tripartite Conference remained unfulfilled.

At a largely attended meeting at the Market Square, Darjeeling on February 2, 1947, the speakers alleged that the planters were not implementing the decision of the Tripartite Conference in regard to wage increase. The increase was supposed to take place from February 15 at the latest.⁶⁸ On March 16, another largely attended meeting of tea garden labour was held at the Market Square in connection with the open session of the first District Conference of the C.P.I. The speakers including Bhabani Sen and Saroj Mukherjee, leaders of the C. P. I. State Committee, mainly dwelt on the oppression of the planters and urged the labourers to join the C.P.I. in order to achieve their legitimate rights. A resolution was passed demanding the grant of increased wages and other amenities to the tea garden labour as decided at the Tripartite Conference.⁶⁹

The apparent failure of the Communists to fulfil the expectations they roused after the Tripartite Conference encouraged the non-Communist groups to try to extend their bases among the tea workers.

During this period, the Congress Socialist Party (later renamed as the Socialist Party of India), previously a part of the National Congress, emerged in the Darjeeling hill areas.⁷⁰ The Socialists took up the cause of the workers of the Singbulli T. E. (P. S. Mirik) who were agitated over the dismissal of two co-workers. On the complaint of the Manager, the Secretary of the Darjeeling District

68. I. B., W. C. R. — 8. 2. 47.

69. I. B., W C. R. — 22. 3. 47 ; also Majumdar S. N. — *op. cit.*, pp. 81-83.

70. I. B., Records — F. No. 586/46.

Tea Garden Workers' Union, the labour front of the S. P. I. and two workers were arrested on May, 21 for alleged tresspass into the garden. As a protest the S. P. I. issued posters and took out a procession jointly with the local Congress volunteers on May 23.⁷¹ The Socialists, however, could not make much headway among the tea garden labourers who were almost vertically divided between the C. P. I. and the Gorkha League.

During this period, the Gorkha League was also not lagging behind in the context of the general discontent among the workers caused by the alleged non-fulfilment of the Tripartite Conference terms. The League leadership, however, was always careful in avoiding protracted agitations. The case of Castleton T. E. (P.O. Kurseong) where the G. L. controlled the labour movement may be taken an illustration.⁷² Here the labour struck work in early April, demanding, initially, increased wages. At the request of the Secretary, G. L. Labour Front, the workers resumed work on April 15. On April 17 the union gave a notice for strike with effect from May 1 if the present manager was not removed. Negotiations led to the call-off of the strike on May 9.

The Communists, on the other hand, again took up the line of militant struggle. Of all the labour agitations during this period that in the Dhajea T. E. was most notable. It was the last important strike struggle of the tea workers of Darjeeling before Independence.

VII

The Case-Study of Dhajea.

Troubles in the Dhajea outgarden of the Munda Kotee T. E. started for the first time in July 1946, the main issues being supply of rationed articles, discharge notices on some coolies and arrest of three coolies. The strike started in both the gardens on July, 25. It was lifted in the Munda Kotee T. E. on July 31, but a partial strike continued in the Dhajea T. E. for forty-seven days with only one-third of the labour force working. Almost all the labourers

71. I. B., W. C. R. — 19. 4. 47; 31. 5. 47.

72. I. B., W. C. R. — 26. 4. 47; 10. 5. 47; 17. 5. 47.

resumed work on September 11, 1946.⁷³ But the situation again became complicated in early December when the management was threatened with a strike if the coolies discharged in July were not reinstated. The management blamed the trouble on the C. P. I. and dismissed Ranabir Rai, believed to be the mainspring of the Communist Union in the garden, and his family. Disciplinary action was taken also against some other workers.⁷⁴ Later eleven of the leaders signed a declaration that they would be amenable to garden discipline. But "the promise was in words only and never followed in action".⁷⁵

Matters went from bad to worse. The C. P. I., which had secured a firm footing in the garden, had for some months fostered a go-slow movement. Events came to a head when in April, the local union leaders demanded increased rates of wages for plucking of leaves. Satyen Majumdar later observed⁷⁶ that this was an all-advised decision on the part of the local leadership because to fight for such a new demand required an adequate labour organisation. The district leadership of the C.P.I. also could not give any practical advice at this stage. The employers took advantage of the situation and decided in favour of a lock-out. The lock-out notice served by the management on April 9, 1947 having expired on April 24, the garden was closed down.

The C. P. I. at that time seemed to be willing for a compromise, but it was the declared policy of the D. P. A. not to negotiate with the Communist Trade Unions. Satyen Majumdar later remarks that the district leaders were not as much active in their protests against the lock-out as they should have been. They ended their work by appealing to the Labour Department and drawing attention of the Bengal Provincial Trade Union Congress. Perhaps they took the entire matter rather casually. The Intelligence Branch Report suggests that the garden coolies also were initially undecided as regards the move they should take. The local C.P.I. members strove hard to retain their hold on the coolies through underground work.⁷⁷

73. I. B., B. P. A. — 18. 8. 46; W. C. R. — 17. 8. 46; 14. 9. 46.

74. I. B., W. C. R. — 28. 12. 46.

75. Quoted in Griffiths — *op. cit.*, p. 30.

76. Majumdar S. N. — *op. cit.*, p. 89.

77. I. B., W. C. R. — 3. 5. 47.

On the 31st day of the lock-out of the Dhajea T. E. (May 25) the local C.P.I. observed the Dhajea Day by organising a public meeting. The Dhajea workers were urged to be firm and not to surrender. They were encouraged in their struggle by the proposed demonstration of support from co-workers of all the gardens in the district.⁷⁸

Abdul Halim, General Secretary of the B.P.T.U.C., in a press statement appealed to all labour unions of Bengal for active help and support to the labour of the Dhajea.⁷⁹ The Intelligence Branch reported that the C.P.I. tried to collect funds in other tea garden areas and to distribute them among the C.P.I. supporter-workers of the Dhajea T. E.⁸⁰

The management decided to take legal steps to evict the Communists from the garden and to provide employment for the loyalists in the head garden of Mundakotee. At this stage, the Communists seemed to be gradually losing their nerves. In a letter dated August 18, addressed to the Labour Commissioner, West Bengal, R.L. Brahmin requested him immediately to put the case of the Dhajea T.E., where the workers had been starving as a result of a lock-out for the last three months and a half, before a Tribunal to avoid further hardship. But no settlement was in sight. The Government reports suggested that in July and August, 1947, the C.P.I. carried on propaganda in the tea gardens holding out a hope before the labourers that they would get a minimum wages of Rs. 1-4 per day. But there had been no major agitations in any garden except for the one at the Ringtong T.E. over the question of supply of rations. Not much support could be enlisted from other gardens for the striking Dhajea workers.⁸¹

The management of the Dhajea T.E. was now determined to go to any extent to contain the growing Communist influence. The administration also perhaps believed that this would be a lesson for workers in other gardens also. It, however, goes to the credit of

78. I. B., W. C. R. — 31. 5. 47.

79. *Swadhinata* — 26. 5. 47.

80. F. R. Bengal — June, 1st Half, 1947.

81. I. B., W. C. R. — 4. 9. 47.

the local Communist organisers that in the face of tremendous repression and without any outside help worth the name, they could carry on a for long period. In the seventh month of the lock-out when the management proposed to re-open the mill on condition that eleven leading workers would be evicted, the ordinary labourers, semi-starved and penniless, did not yet give in. Finally, the alleged instigators were dismissed and eviction orders were secured from the law courts against eleven of them. The will of the workers to resist was completely worn out. The lock-out which continued for nearly nine months was lifted on January 26, 1948. The declaration of the C.P.I. as an illegal organisation (Feb. 1948) further weakened the organisation of the union. But inspite of all these, the nucleus of the party organisation in the Dhajea T.E. remained intact and proved to be one of the important bases of underground organisation.⁸²

However, it should be admitted that the case of Dhajea was a glorious exception and not a general one. By the time of Independence, the Communists lost much of their earlier influence in the Darjeeling gardens. And in the immediate post-Independence period, the Indian National Trade Union Congress, backed by the Provincial Ministry, made strenuous efforts to have a dent in this region.

VIII

The Dooars Uprising (Jan.-Feb. 1947) :

The All India Tripartite Conference on tea plantation labour (Jan. 8-9, 1947) was followed by a fresh outbreak of labour agitation in the Dooars. According to a Government report, the Communists started claiming credit for what was gained at the Delhi Conference and carried on propaganda among the workers about an impending wage increase. Apart, however, from such political manoeuvres, the government itself admitted that there were genuine grievances among the tea-garden labour in the Dooars which gave the Communists their chance. There was no uniformity in labour conditions and till then not much had been done by the Dooars Planters' Association to improve matters.⁸³

82. Majumdar S. N. — *op cit.*

83. F. R. Bengal — March, 1st Half, 1947.

The Dooars tea labour agitation took a serious turn in the context of the "Tebhaga Movement", the movement of the share-croppers initiated by the C.P.I. demanding an increase in their share of harvest, which rocked almost the whole of Bengal during the autumn and winter of 1946-47. It spread also to the Dooars, though somewhat later, between February and April, 1947. It provided an ideal opportunity for united action by workers and peasants, both mostly tribal, in and around the tea gardens. Here again, the unionized railway workers took the initiative, publicised the Tebhaga movement among tea workers through leaflets and clandestine meetings. Volunteer groups were formed among tea workers who would strike work in order to participate in the movement.⁸⁴

By the end of January, 1947, the unrest at the Dooars gardens was at its peak. This unrest was different from the previous isolated incidents when the workers, in a fit of temper, beat up the Manager or his assistants or suddenly struck work in a particular garden. Now, labour revolted en masse in a large number of gardens. They left work to join the peasants in their struggles, at the same time ventilating their own grievances. The following extract from the annual report of the Indian Tea Association for the year 1947 points to the labour's mood at the time:⁸⁵ "... as a result of outside agitation bands of labourers had left their work and helped by Communist leaders, were roaming the countryside, in many cases armed with lathis, and spears with the object of entering the bustees and raiding paddy stocks in support of general demands of the ryots of the district for a two-thirds share of the paddy crops." The version of the Communists, however, was that as the employers were going back upon even the minor promises made by them at the Tripartite Conference, the tea labourers in different gardens spontaneously struck work and this wave had been gradually spreading.⁸⁶ In most cases, demands put forward by the tea-labour included higher wages ; increase of rations, specially rice ; better and sufficient cloth ; special allowance for women labour ; better leave facilities and removal of certain factory clerks and ration Babus who allegedly cheated the garden coolies in respect of

84. Bhowmik, S. — *op. cit.*

85. Annual Report of the I. T. A., 1947 — pp. 40-41.

86. *Swadhinata* — 21. 2. 1947.

their pay and rations. In some gardens, the Indian supervisory staff had been forced to leave.

The labour agitation reached a new height, particularly in some gardens in the Malbazar section, during the period between January 27 and February 23. In some gardens, the coolies assaulted the Babus and in one case even the Manager. In most cases, the garden authorities initially did not lodge any complaint with the police, but tried to pacify the coolies themselves by meeting their demands partially. But within a short a time, the situation took a dangerous turn. On one occasion, on February 15, about 600 coolies armed with bows and arrows surrounded the house of a head clerk of a particular garden. The situation was brought under control by the police.⁸⁷ Again, on February 18, a number of coolies searching for arrested persons stopped two police lorries while they were proceeding to the Mal police station, but desisted from further violence as no arrested person could be found in the lorries.⁸⁸

Khagen Das Gupta, the local Congress M.L.A., from Jalpaiguri, described in the Assembly that there had been labour "risings" in the tea gardens in the Malbazar area, the worst affected tea estates being Needam, Haihaipathar, Toonbari, Malnadi, Gurjanghora, Dalimkole, Soongachi and Nagza Saita. He also complained that the S.P. was attacked by a mob in the Dumchipara T.E. in the Dooars necessitating police firing and also that 250 garden clerks with their families had to take refuge at Malbazar town, leaving their property at the mercy of labourers. Das Gupta's speech clearly suggests that the local Congress not only disapproved of the militant agitation of the garden coolies but also felt much alarmed about the safety and security of the Indian Supervisory Staff. The government however, disagreed with this assessment, described it only as "labour unrest," denied any police firing and said that clerks of some of the gardens in this area left in the beginning of the unrest out of sheer panic.

87. *The Statesman*—26. 4. 47; *Swadhinata* 26. 4. 47: Written statement placed in the Assembly by Nasrulla Khan, Parliamentary Secretary, Labour Department on behalf of the Government of Bengal, on the Tea Garden Labour unrest in Jalpaiguri (Sadar) and Dooars Sub-Division.

88. *The Statesman* — 26. 4. 47.

After the failure of the initial attempts to control the labour force by the alternate methods of concession and repression, the planters began to realise that there was an organised movement behind this unrest, for it was not the tea garden workers alone who were fighting but also the neighbouring peasant share-croppers and the railway workers. Various strategies were tried by the planters with little or no success. In the beginning of February, managers tried in every possible way to prevent the Communists from holding meetings at the "hats", usually held on tea garden lands. At a meeting of the Nagarkata Sub-District Committee of the D.P.A. held on February 10, 1947, it was decided that should Communists try and hold meetings in the bazar of the particular garden, the manager should call the neighbouring managers for help. Reports of how some meetings were disrupted and the possible ways to tackle the situation were discussed in subsequent meetings on February 20 and 23. The Committee also urged the district authorities to promulgate Sec. 144 throughout the Dooars till the prevailing agitation subsided.⁸⁹ But these plans had no effect on rebel workers who were still leaving the gardens in large batches to join the peasants in their struggle. The planters then decided again to use persuasion. Managers tried to dissuade the workers through their loyal colleagues telling them that this was a peasant movement and that they would not benefit by it. The help of the Catholic priests and nuns were also utilised for propaganda against the Communist agitators. But these techniques did not work.⁹⁰

The only alternative that remained was to crush the movement with all the might of the administration. As early as on February 4, at an emergency meeting of the Dam Dim Sub District Committee, the planters sent emergency appeals to the district authorities to send armed police in view of the "serious rioting and disturbances by outside Communist influence."⁹¹ The emergency general meeting of the D.P.A. on February 19 which the District Police Super was invited to attend, sent a frantic telegram to the Deputy Commissioner

89. Annual Report of the D. P. A., 1947, Appendix-C : p. 225, pp. 227-30.

90. Dasgupta Bimal — "Dooars Tebhaga Andolan : Krishak Sramiker Rakhi Bandhan" (Bengal) in *Tebhaga Andolaner Rajat Jayanti* (Cal' 1971) p. 105.

91. Annual Report of the D. P. A., 1947, Appendix-C, P. 143.

of Jalpaiguri⁹² : "serious rioting taking place or apprehended on all garden. Your presence is urgently requested with adequate force to restore order."

The Government finally intervened. The situation changed after February 23 with the posting of sufficient police in this area and with the promulgation of order U/S 144 G.P.C. in the area, prohibiting public meetings or processions without previous permission of the appropriate authorities and banning the carrying of lethal or dangerous weapons in public. The C.P.I. alleged that the union leaders were being prohibited from entering the gardens even for conducting normal trade union activities. The C.P.I. however, was in no mood to come into direct confrontation with the state machinery. For the time being, the situation eased. On behalf of the C.P.I., letters were reportedly written to the managers of some gardens expressing regret for the assaults on some clerks and requesting recall of the clerks who had left the gardens giving an assurance that no such incident would recur in future.⁹³

During this time the C.P.I. had been carrying on hectic activities in connection with the forthcoming by-election from the Jalpaiguri (reserved) constituency where the C.P.I. put up a candidate. The mass-movement and the election propaganda merged for all practical purposes.⁹⁴ A number of public meetings were regularly organised. Leaflets in Bengali and Hindi were issued. The main theme of all these was to urge the workers to form unions under the direction of the C.P.I. and to work as volunteers for the C.P.I. candidate in the ensuing election. In these meetings, slogans demanding abolition of the jotedari system, introduction of Tebhaga and "Bilati Malik London Bhago" were raised. Such slogan indicate that the Tebhaga movement had helped in awakening nationalist and anti-colonial feelings among the workers. Although eventually the Communist candidate was defeated, the election propaganda had an appreciable impact upon the workers' organisation.

92. Ibid — pp. 147-49.

93. *The Statesman* — 26. 4. 47; *Swadhinata* — 26. 4. 47: Assembly Statement by Nasarulla Khan, *op cit*.

94. I. B., File No. 586-46; Bengal Police Abstract dt. 8. 3. 47.

Finally, the Tebhaga movement in the Dooars was called off in the beginning of May, 1947. The leaders felt that since most share-croppers had two-thirds of their harvest there was no need to prolong it.⁹⁵ The movement of the Dooars tea garden labourers also came to an end. The tea planters, however, consoled themselves by arguing⁹⁶ :

“Although propaganda by Communist agitators created a certain amount of unrest, the number of garden labour paying regular subscription to Communist unions is not thought to have increased to any great extent.” But it must be admitted that the awakening among the tea-garden labour had positive results.⁹⁷ Planters increased wages twice — once in October-November, 1946 and again in February 1947. Between August 1946 and April 1947, the daily rate of “Hazira” increased by stages from the initial 6 As. to 8 As., 12 As., and finally to 14 As. registering an increase of nearly 130 p.c. The desirability of uniformity in all matters of wages and service conditions had been impressed on the various tea gardens by the D.P.A.

The Aftermath of the Uprising :

The tea planters could never forget the bitter experience of Feb-April, 1947 which made them think of an alternative to counteract the Communist influence on the workers. At this time, besides the C.P.I., certain other non-Communist parties were also active in the district. The planters sought to take advantage of the existence of competing organisations.

The Gorkha League of Darjeeling had been trying to widen its bases, particularly among the Nepalese-majority areas of Jalpaiguri district.⁹⁸ Some unions established by the G.L., specially in the Kalchini P. S. area, were from the beginning favourably looked upon by the garden managers.⁹⁹ But as these unions had influence over

95. Bhowmik, S. — *op. cit.*

96. Annual Report of the I. T. A., 1947 pp. 42-43.

97. *Swadhinata* — 4. 5. 47; Nani Bhowmik, “Bikkhubdha Dooars : Cha Bagan Sramiker Jiban O Sangram”.

98. I. B., File No. 586-46; B. P. A. dt. 8. 3. 47.

99. Annual Report of the D. P. A., 1946, p. 104.

only a limited section of workers they did not fit in well with the planters' bigger scheme of combating Communist influence.

The Intelligence Branch reported in July 1947 the activities of the Socialist Party (formerly, C.S.P.) which organised four unions of tea garden workers consisting of about 25,000 members in Jalpaiguri (Sadar) Sub-division.¹⁰⁰ The Revolutionary Socialist Party which also claimed to be a Communist organisation, contemplated organising workers in the Eastern Dooars. Its head quarters were at Kalchini. The organisers had to bear all sorts of atrocities from the planters, just like their C.P.I. counterparts.¹⁰¹ Their union, the Dooars Cha Bagan Workers' Union, was registered in 1948. In fact, the planters could not trust any of these non-C.P.I. left organisations.

It was at this time that the Secretary of the Jalpaiguri District Congress Committee, Devendra Nath Sarkar, sent letters (July 25, 1947) to the two Planters' Associations, D.P.A. I.T.P.A., seeking their permission to form trade unions among plantation workers. This proposal came as a boon to the planters. It was discussed at a special meeting of the Executive Committee of the I.T.P.A. on August 2, 1947 where it was decided that the association should "advise member bodies to give every possible help and assistance to the Congress."¹⁰² The D.P.A. was also as cordial to the Congress Trade Unions. At a Committee meeting on August 11, it was decided that the D.P.A. should encourage the Congress to form unions. At the same time, the D.P.A. feared that this might also encourage some Communists to enter the garden in the guise of Congress workers. Therefore, it was decided that "the Congress members with cards of identification will be given permission to hold meetings in gardens with a view to form trade unions."¹⁰³ Subsequently, the D.P.A.'s Labour Officer, J.L. Jenkins informed the garden managers that the Congress was¹⁰⁴ "new in the trade union

100. I. B., Records—Review of the Revolutionary Matters by the D. I. G. I. B. dt. 10. 7. 1947.

101. Bhattacharya Nani—*Cha Bugeecha Mazdoor Andolan Ka Itihas Aur Cha Mazdooronki Samasyange*, in Hindi (Kalchini, 1973).

102. Annual Report of the I. T. P. A., 1947, p. 112.

103. Annual Report of the D. P. A., 1947, p. 119.

104. Annual Report of the D. P. A., 1948, p. XXV.

field in this area and the managers should help the organisers in their work. A few words of encouragement would go a long way. They were making some progress and about thirty Congress-sponsored units had been started." By November-December, 1947, a number of Congress Labour unions were formed, particularly in the Dam Dim and Nagrakata area.¹⁰⁵

Dr. S. Bhowmik has described,¹⁰⁶ on the basis of interviews with some workers of a tea-garden near Birpara in Central Dooars, including a former union leader, how the Congress had formed the union there with the help of the Manager. After forming the union in the garden, the Manager took some workers to Calcutta to get it registered. This garden belonged to one of the important members of the I.T.P.A. Workers of Rydak, Jainti and Sankos in the remote corners of the Eastern Dooars, according to Bhowmik, also spoke of similar incidents in their areas.

Thus, on the eve of Independence, the gardens were accessible only to the trade unionists who were in the good books of the planters. These unions came into existence just before Independence and their importance increased only after Independence. Still in spite of all hindrance to Communist activities, their influence could not be eliminated.

IX

Concluding Observations

Compared to other organised industries the development of labour movement in the tea industry was a much belated process. Even within the tea industry, Bengal lagged much behind Assam. The wave of the Non Co-operation Movement (1920-22) touched both Assam and Bengal gardens; although in varying degrees and might be regarded as the starting point of the tea labour movement. But the comparison ends there. Assam had a more or less continuous tradition of labour movement since then and particularly from the mid-1930's onwards. But in the Darjeeling and Dooars

105. Annual Report of the I. T. A , 1947, pp. 42-43.

106. Bhowmik S. - *op. cit.*

gardens, the labour uprising during 1920-22 remained just an isolated event and no organised agitation was noticeable till about 1945. Even in the two contiguous tea producing districts of Bengal, compared to Darjeeling, the organised trade union movement among the Dooars Workers had a late start. While in Darjeeling, the movement started from the middle of 1945, becoming strong enough by the beginning of 1946 to return a Communist candidate in the Assembly from the tea labour seat, the movement in the Dooars began only after the middle of 1946.

The late start of the labour movement in the Bengal tea gardens can be attributed to three factors. First, the restrictions imposed by the planters made it extremely difficult for outsiders to contact the garden labour. For this purpose, the planters, backed by the British Government, introduced an elaborate network of institutional devices. However, this factor alone, does not fully explain the late start, because such restrictions were in force in every tea producing area including Assam. So, other factors need to be identified.

The second factor was the inability of the nationalists to organise the tea workers, partly due to the "communication gap" between the local leaders, mostly educated middle class "Bhadraloks" and the tea labour of the Dooars and Terai, mostly immigrant tribals, having little formal education and belonging to an altogether different culture, and partly due to lack of efficient and energetic organizers. In the Darjeeling hills, there was not much of this communication gap because ethnically the local leadership and the labourers were of Nepalese origin. But in that case, the Congress organisation itself had a late start and was a house divided.

The third and the most important factor was the unwillingness of the nationalist leaders to take up the cause of labour. The existence of quite a large number of Indian-owned gardens whose owners were closely related with most of the District Congress leaders and the fact that conditions of labour in these gardens, were in no way better than those in the European-owned gardens made them particularly reluctant to take up the cause of tea labour, especially in the Dooars.

For these reasons, it was not the nationalists, but the left radicals, more precisely the Communists, who started the trade

union organisation in Bengal tea gardens. The resounding victory of the C.P.I. candidate from the Darjeeling tea labour seat (1946), an event inconsistent with the general trend in the voting behaviour in the labour constituencies, is to be seen in this context. So, the policy and the organisational style of the C.P.I. deserves a close scrutiny.

The three-tier structure of the Communist organisation differed from area to area. In Darjeeling the first rank was the "top" leadership in the person of Sushil Chatterjee, the organiser sent by the Bengal Provincial Committee of the C.P.I., who acted as a link between the District Committee and the head quarters and was held in high esteem and confidence by both. Satyendra Narayan Majumdar, also sent by the Provincial Committee somewhat later, was similarly a 'top' leader. There were occasional misunderstandings between Chatterjee and Majumdar. To the second rank belonged the prominent district level leaders like Ratanlal Brahmin M.L.A., Ganesh Lal Subha (Secretary, Tea Garden Workers' Union, Darjeeling), Madan Kumar Thapa (Secretary Students' Federation, Darjeeling), and Hari Prasad Sharma (Secretary Kurseong Sub-Division Committee of the C.P.I.), all in the hill areas and Nripendra Basu in the plains of the district. In the third rank, were the workers-leaders in different gardens who had day to day contacts with the mass of co-workers. This third rank of leadership, i.e. local leadership from the gardens itself, however, was almost absent in the Teria area of the district before Independence. Thus, in the hills of Darjeeling, a chain of leadership worked. A notable aspect of the Communist labour organization in the Darjeeling Hills was the presence of a large number of local and district level leaders belonging to the same social and ethnic community as most of the tea workers.

In the Dooars, the three-tier structure of the organisation was somewhat different. At the top, the middle class educated Bengali Communist leaders who dominated the district committee of the C.P.I. held most of the office-bearers' posts of the apex body of the tea labourers : the Jalpaiguri Zila Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union. The middle rank was composed of the organizers of the Bengal-Dooars Railway Workers' Union and a few vanguards in some tea gardens

situated near the railway stations. The bottom rank was composed of the tribal tea garden labourers, with the cultivators of the same ethnic group actively backing them. So, what was most crucial for the Dooars movement was the interaction between the three factors : the unionised railway workers and employees having a heterogeneous composition i.e., men coming from Bihar and U.P., Nepalis, upper caste Hindu Bengalis, Muslims and tribals ; the overwhelmingly tribal tea-garden labour, which was just being organised at the time ; and the immigrant tribal peasants (with the exception of a sprinkling of Rajbansis and Muslims), mostly unorganised.

The structural difference in the organisation perhaps led to the differences in the nature of the movement. In Darjeeling, the party had a firmer control over the labour organisations and directly guided them. In the Dooars, the element of spontaneity in the labour movement was much more pronounced.

From the point of view of strategy, the garden labour movement, in both Darjeeling and the Dooars, unmistakably shows an interplay between an ideologically and politically motivated attempt to organise the labour from above and a spontaneous response from below, often verging on an elemental outburst of the workers' wrath and fury. Without this vertical and horizontal mobilization the sweep and intensity exhibited at different points of time would not have been achieved. The character of the struggle, however, took slightly different forms in Darjeeling and the Dooars. At a particular point of time, compared to Darjeeling, the movement in the Dooars became much more militant and widespread, perhaps crossing the limits set by the party machinery.

In Darjeeling the numerous strikes during 1945-47 point to the genuine grievances of labourers over questions such as wages and allowances, supply of ration and dismissal or eviction from gardens. The Communists readily took advantage of these opportunities and organised militant strikes. In the Dooars, the particular composition of the peasants and the tea garden workers made the upheaval there (February-April, 1947) very much a tribal warfare. It represented a sudden outburst of discontent and anger prevailing among tribal peasants and workers for many years. Whereas the tea workers' movement in Darjeeling was typical of the industrial workers'

agitation, the movement in the Dooars was an example of a broader peasant-labour united struggle, both coming from the same tribal segments. It would, however, be wrong to view it as an exclusively tribal movement. The leadership given by the Communist Party and the role of the organised railway workers were the most crucial factors in initiating the process of class struggle and making it part of the broader movement of peasants and workers. But the level of consciousness or political awareness of the aboriginal workers should not be overestimated. The strike struggles which started since July–August, 1946 originally centred round specific issues, such as demand for higher wages, increased rations or protest against misbehaviour of a particular garden “Babu” or Manager. Only at a later stage, February–April, 1947, did the demand for tebhaga add a new vigour to the movement and lead to the alliance between tribal peasants and workers. But that proved to be shortlived and with the end of the Tebhaga movement, the tea workers’ movement also virtually ended.

As for the actual goal of the C.P.I., the planters always complained that the ulterior aim of the Communists was expropriation of the rightful owners of the tea-estates. However, despite the revolutionary fervour that the C.P.I. manifestoes displayed, the Communists never actually made nationalization of tea estates or workers’ ownership or participation in the management major issues in their demand charters. In the numerous strike movements and even in the Tripartite Conference in New Delhi, the stress was always on temporary economic benefits or political demands, such as recognition by planters of Communist-led workers’ unions. Thus, there were differences between the ultimate aims and the immediate programmes of the Communists. It, however, may be argued that militancy does not necessarily preclude occasional compromises.

Indirectly, however, the impact of the tea workers’ movements went much beyond the specific economic demands and had wider political and social ramifications. It reflected the first organised and collective attempt to strike at the enormous power exercised by the planters who constituted integral components of the colonial power structure. These movements projected a new kind of radical leadership as an alternative to the pre-existing nationalist or reformist

liberal trade union leadership. The implications of this were not missed by the tea planters.

So, we find that although the pioneering work in the trade union organisation was done by the Communists, they had soon to face challenges from other political groups some of which were actively encouraged by planters themselves. In Darjeeling the Communists faced the main challenge from the labour front of the All India Gorkha League, basically a parochial organisation, which soon came to be openly backed by the planters. Over the economic grievances of the workers, there was little or no difference between the C.P.I. and the A.I.G.L., although there were tactical differences. While the Communists were apparently more aggressive, the Gorkha League leadership, in spite of its occasional militancy, followed the path of conciliation and negotiated settlement. The real reason of the inter-union clashes was the attempt on the part of the different trade unions to extend their spheres of influence. It is noteworthy that though in their public speeches, the Communist leaders always strongly criticized the Gorkha League leadership they appealed to the rank and file of the League to maintain unity against the planters. Besides the Gorkha League, the Indian National Congress and the Socialist Party also tried to extend their bases, but could never become a force to reckon with. The planters could never fully trust them. In fact, the progressive elements of the Congress and the Socialists received from the garden managers the same kind of ill treatment as the Communists did. The planters were eager to placate the Gorkha League, whom they regarded as the "lesser evil" and the most effective check against the Communists.

The case of the Dooars was more complex. The labour politics here was much more faction-ridden. The Communists had to face a challenge from other leftist groups like the R.S.P., and the Socialist Party which built up strong bases in the Alipurduar and Sadar Sub-divisions respectively, and even from some progressive Congressmen. And above all, just on the eve of Independence, the official Congress Committee for the first time entered the labour field to collaborate with the management for maintaining industrial peace.

Thus, neither in Darjeeling nor in the Dooars the Communists remained for long the unchallenged force. In spite of some glorious historic moments of militant struggle, the Communists failed to sustain the political awareness of the tea workers and to raise it to a higher level so that the tea workers could play the vanguard's role in the struggle of the industrial proletariat.

THE ROUND TABLE NEGOTIATIONS (1921)

MANJU GOPAL MUKHERJEE

The Round Table negotiations in December 1921 formed an important episode in the history of Indian nationalist struggle of the period. The negotiations took place at a critical hour, when the Congress was at the cross-roads, and held the key to the future lines of development of nationalist politics. The episode also brought into focus sharp differences between Mahatma Gandhi and C. R. Das. Even today it remains a matter of great controversy.

In December C. R. Das was in the Presidency Jail of Calcutta, where Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya came to see him, as it was then believed, with the Viceroy's offer of a Round Table Conference to explore the possibility of a constitutional advance if the Congress agreed to suspend Non-co-operation and lift the boycott of the Prince of Wales's visit. C. R. Das believed in negotiation as a method of political settlement.¹ His policy was one of putting pressure on the British Raj by militant struggle like non-co-operation and civil disobedience and also by diplomatic moves to extort constitutional concessions. Hence he welcomed the proposal and after consultation with Malaviya and Azad, recommended waiving the proposed hartal on 24 December, the day on which the Prince of Wales was to visit Calcutta, on three conditions : the Government convening a conference to consider all questions raised by the Congress, the withdrawal of the repressive laws and Government notifications against the Congress volunteers, and the release of all prisoners under the Criminal law Amendment Act.² These terms represented a common formula of agreement between Lord Reading and Malaviya, Das and others, as the Viceroy had assured his willingness to agree to them.³

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1. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, Calcutta, 1959, p. 14.
 2. Telegram of C. R. Das and Azad to Gandhi, Calcutta, 19 December, 1921, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Delhi, November 1960, later cited as CWG, Vol. XXII, p. 54.
 3. See Malaviya's Press Note, dated Amritsar, June 30, 1923, quoted in Krishnadas, *Seven Months with Mahatma Gandhi*, Madras, 1928, Vol. II, p. 153. This book contains very important materials for this episode — See pp. 89-206.

When the message was first conveyed to Gandhi at Ahmedabad, Jayakar, who sat very near Gandhi, saw the Mahatma 'silent in deep thought'. He felt Gandhiji was willing to consider the proposal. But he quickly changed his mind due to the influence of some of his 'inflated' followers and Maulavis and spurned the offer.⁴ He insisted on two additional points for calling off the hartal and considering the offer, a stand from which he never departed,⁵ — the previous fixation of the date and the composition of the Conference and the unconditional release also of the Ali Brothers⁶ and their associates. In this context Gandhi's assertion, "I impose no conditions", does not appear to be correct.⁷ It was on this rock that the proposed Conference foundered as the Viceroy refused to consent to the last condition.

The incident sparked off a great controversy. Conflicting opinions have been expressed on it by contemporaries and historians. Among contemporaries Rajendra Prasad, and Jawaharlal Nehru have justified Gandhi's action, while C. R. Das, Subhas Bose and Maulana Azad have strongly criticised Gandhi.⁸ Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru intimated to Gandhi from prison that they were opposed to armistice on "deceptive terms".⁹ To modern historians like Dr. R.C. Majumdar

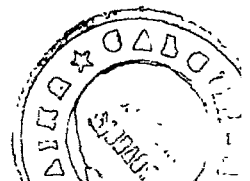
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4. Jayakar, *The Story of My Life*, Bombay, 1959, Vol. I, pp. 504-505.
 5. Gandhi's telegram to Shyamsundar Chakravarti, Sabarmati, 21 December 1921, and Gandhi's telegram to Jamnadas Dwarkadas, Sabarmati, 22 December 1921, CWG, Vol. XXII, pp. 60-61. These two telegrams clearly indicate that Gandhi stuck to his terms to the end and never modified them, contrary to such impressions of Malaviya and others, which then prevailed. See Malaviya's interview to *The Voice of India*, Bombay, 4 July 1923, quoted in Jayakar, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 516 and also Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 169.
 6. Gandhi's telegram to Das and Azad, Sabarmati, 19 December, 1921, C.W.G., Vol. XXII, pp. 54-55.
 7. *Young India*, 1919-1922, Madras 1922; 19 January 1922, pp. 959-960.
 8. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, Bombay, 1957, pp. 156-157; Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 1936, pp. 87-88; Subhas Chandra Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, Calcutta, 1948, pp. 99-100; A. K. Azad, op. cit., pp. 14-15.
 9. Motilal Nehru to Gandhi, 21 12. 1921, *Young India*, 29 December 1921, and Lajpat Rai to Gandhi, *Young India*, 12 January 1922, quoted in Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 203-204; Not much importance is to be attached to the opinions of many of these leaders, who were then in Jail

and D. A. Low the incident appeared to be pregnant with great possibilities and they have justified the stand of C. R. Das. H. N. Dasgupta thinks that the move "might have turned the course of Indian history".¹⁰

Such an assessment does not seem to be well-founded. Contrary to the widespread impression, Lord Reading did not take any initiative in this matter. He wrote to Montagu a little later: "I have been impressed by the determined rush that was made in December last ... to get me immediately to call a Round Table Conference."¹¹ This clearly shows that the initiative came from others. Subhas Bose's observation that Malaviya came to jail 'with a message from the Viceroy'¹² is not untrue as Malaviya was then holding frequent meetings with the Viceroy, who agreed to some of his terms. But Dr. R. C. Majumdar's interpretation of Bose's statement as 'implying that it was the Viceroy who took the initiative'¹³ appears to be wrong. There is also nothing on record to justify Dr. Majumdar's assumption that 'Lord Reading made a serious attempt to come to an understanding with C. R. Das'.¹⁴ Malaviya's Press Note, (Amritsar, 30 June 1923), states: "It is not correct to say they [the proposals in Das's telegram to Gandhi] were terms offered by the Government. *They were proposals put by me before the Viceroy* in consultation with some friends..." Similarly unfounded are the observations in some books that the emissaries

and thus not in a position to assess the developments taking place outside. Das, Azad, Birendra Nath Samsal and Subhas Chandra Bose are to be excepted as they were in close touch with Malaviya and hence fully conversant with the new developments.

10. See R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol. III, Calcutta, 1963, pp. 142-146; D. A. Low, 'The Government of India and the First Non-co-operation Movement, 1920-1922', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXV, No. 2, February 1966, pp. 246-250; H. N. Dasgupta, *Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das*, Delhi, January, 1960, p. 73.
11. Reading to Montagu, 23 February 1922, 'Reading Collection', Vol. 4, letters to Secretary of State, January to March 1922, p. 20; See also Reading to Peel, 19 April 1923, Reading Collection, Vol. 6, Letters to Secretary of State, January to December 1923, p. 54.
12. Subhas Chandra Bose, op. cit., p. 99.
13. R. C. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 143.
14. Ibid.



were sent to Gandhi 'at the instance of the Viceroy'¹⁵ or by the Government.¹⁶ Reading's son has also written": Lord Reading set his face against all such hints and proposals [of a Round Table Conference], and declared his intention of refusing to take the initiative in summoning such a conference ..."¹⁷ Malaviya categorically denied later that he acted as an agent of the Viceroy or received any indication from the latter to open these negotiations.¹⁸ He even stated, "... when I approached him, I did not find him ready to agree to a Round Table Conference or to any of the proposals I made to him. It took me three interviews to persuade Lord Reading to receive a deputation."¹⁹ Similarly, Sapru also made it clear that he had 'no message from the Government to convey' and acted 'purely in my personal capacity'.²⁰

Thus the proposal of a conference came, not from Reading, but from 'various quarters both in India and England'.²¹ The initiative was taken by the Independent and Moderate leaders like Malaviya, Sapru, Mrs. Besant, Jinnah and others.²² Not quite in sympathy with Non-co-operation and critical of Government repression they acted on their own and not as emissaries of Gandhi

15. Jayakar, op. cit., 14A. Quoted in Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 158 – Italics mine, Vol. I, p. 504.
16. J. H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society: Twentieth-Century Bengal*, California, 1968, p. 229.
17. Marquess of Reading, *Rufus Isaacs: First Marquess of Reading*, London, 1945, Vol. II, p. 193.
18. Malaviya's interview with the *Voice of India*, Bombay, 4 July 1923, quoted in Jayakar, Vol. I, p. 516.
19. Ibid.
20. Sapru to Hignell, Private Secretary to the Viceroy, 16 December 1921, Sapru Papers, MSS, Vol. XXII, R 291, p. 390.
21. Marquess of Reading, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 193; Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 115-119; Government of India, – later cited as G.I. – Home Department (Political), File No. 303/1921.
22. See the Press statement of Jamnadas Dwarkadas and Hridaynath Kunzru, dated Benaras, 23 December 1921, which appeared in *The Bombay Chronicle*, 27 December 1921, quoted in Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 115-116; Reading to Montagu, Telegram, Delhi, November 2, 1921, Hyde, *Lord Reading*, London, 1967, p. 361, the Viceroy referred to his interview with Jinnah, who offered himself in the 'role of broker' to bring about a settlement; Ed. Rushbrook Williams, *India in 1921-1922*.

or Reading with a view to bringing the Government and the Congress together to obtain a desirable political settlement. But, as Reading rightly assessed, they "have no authority to deliver the goods"²³ and the Viceroy himself admitted that he was "not prepared to make substantial sacrifices" to arrive at a settlement.^{23,4} In fact in his speech to the deputation headed by Malaviya that waited on him at Calcutta on 21 December he belittled it for its lack of authority and demanded the assurance of cessation of Non-co-operation activities as a precondition for convening a conference. He also uttered a note of caution against any further political advance unless favourable impression was produced on the British Parliament, which was the sole authority to amend the Government of India Act.²⁴ He wrote to Montagu that he "was against extension of the reforms, as I thought the time had not yet arrived". In fact, Non-co-operation and affront to the Prince of Wales led to "a certain hardening of British opinion with regard to India", so that the British Parliament refused "to consider the granting of further reforms for sometime", a policy with which Reading admitted that he was "in agreement".²⁵ The British Cabinet ultimately decided 'not to consent' to the proposed conference.²⁶

All these facts justify the conclusion that neither Lord Reading nor the Government of Britain was prepared for an early constitutional advance, let alone provincial autonomy. That Reading received the deputation was more a tactical move on his part not to further estrange the Moderates than an earnest desire to come to a settlement. He wrote to Montagu: 'it would have been bad tactics to have given a definite refusal to a conference and worse to

23. Montagu to Reading, 26 January 1922, Reading Collection, Vol. 4, Letters from the Secretary of State, January to March 1922, p. 14; See also *Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal*, January to June 1922, No. 1, Part II, *The Indian Daily News*, 22 December, 1921, p. 11.

23A. Reading to Montagu, Telegram, 2 November, 1921, Hyde, op. cit.

24. Ed. N. Mitra, *Indian Annual Register*, — later cited as I.A.R.—1922, Vol. I, pp. 262-264.

25. Reading to Montagu, 16 February 1922, Reading to Montagu, 23 February, 1922, Reading Collection Vol. 4, Letters to the Secretary of State, January to March 1922, pp. 19-20; See also Montagu to Reading, 1 February 1922, Reading Collection, Vol. 4, Letters from the Secretary of State, p. 21.

26. Reading to Montagu, 5 January 1922, Reading Collection, op. cit., p. 3.

have excused myself from receiving the deputation".²⁷ The alarming prospect of the Moderates slipping into the arms of the Congress due to their annoyance at the repressive policy of the Government, and their unexpected *volte face* in favour of the non-co-operators²⁸ were new factors in December 1921, which, more than the success of Non-co-operation, led Reading to agree eventually to the idea of a conference.²⁹ He claimed that his policy "has had the effect of steadying moderate opinion which was very much on the run towards non-co-operation".³⁰

Secondly, Reading had all along been sceptical about whether the Conference would come off at all and its ultimate outcome. He wrote to Montagu : "I always doubted strongly whether Malaviya and his friends would succeed in getting the only assurances I could have regarded as satisfactory from Gandhi and the other leaders".³¹ He doubted the possibility of any real compromise with the non-co-operators unless they made "very material changes in their programme",³² which then seemed unlikely in the context of the intensity of their agitation. He knew too that he and Gandhi were working at cross-purposes. If he was adamant in insisting on unconditional withdrawal of Non-co-operation, Gandhi wanted the Government to show its penitence first by stopping its "aggravatingly

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27. Reading to Montagu, 28 December 1921, Reading Collection, Vol. 3, Letters to Secretary of State, April to December 1921, p. 201.
 28. H.D. Craik to H.L. Stephenson, 28 December 1921, Govt. of Bengal, Pol. Department, Pol. Branch, File 14, 1922, Serial No. 1 ; *Report on Non-co-operation and Labour*, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Bulletin for the week ending 17 December 1921.
 29. Reading to Montagu, Private Telegrams, 15, 16, 17, 18 December 1921. I owe these references to D.A. Low's article in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, p. 249.
 30. Reading to Montagu, 28 December 1921, Reading Collection, op cit., p. 201 ; See also D.A. Low, op cit., pp. 248-250 and also p. 257 ; Srinivasa Shastri's Presidential Speech at the First Bombay Provincial Liberal Conference at Bombay on 6 May 1922 quoted in Krishnadas, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 103 ; See also Amales Tripathi, 'Gandhi's Second Rise To Power' *The Calcutta Historical Journal*, Vol 1, No. 1, July 1976, pp. 2-3.
 31. Reading to Montagu, 23 December 1921 Reading Collection, op cit., p. 201.
 32. Reading to his son, quoted in Marquess of Reading, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 193.

offensive activity, aimed not at violence, but at ... absolutely non-violent agitation".³³ "Probably we should have never been able to agree about the Ali Brothers", Reading confided to Montague, "as Gandhi would have insisted on their release and I would not have agreed".³⁴

Reading's overture appeared to Gandhi and many others, not without some reason, to have an airiness about it, since it did not indicate a fixed date, personnel and agenda of the Conference. Hence in the light of the Viceroy's non-committal attitude, which Gandhi read more correctly than others, and the mood and temper of the Government, manifested in what Gandhi censured as 'lawless repression', the Mahatma's distrust of British intentions³⁵ was justified. One object of the Government was obviously to ensure the success of the Prince of Wales' mission to Calcutta and to save the face of the bureaucracy. Gandhi was able to see through this game and refused to be duped on that score. But he was not alone in this and this represents only one side of the shield.

It is not true to say, as has been mistakenly alleged by some, that C. R. Das was diplomatically 'outmanoeuvred' by Reading,³⁶ although he might have been optimistic about a settlement. Azad, who was then with Das in the same jail, has made the point clear. He writes candidly : "Both Mr. Das and I came to conclusion that it was our boycott of the Prince of Wales which had compelled the Government of India to seek a settlement. We would take advantage of the situation and meet in a Round Table Conference. It was clear to us that this would not lead to our goal but none the less it would mark a great step forward in our political struggle. His

33. I. A. R., 1922, Vol. I, p. 265 ; See also Gandhi's telegram to Shyamsunder Chakravarti, Sabarmati, 21 December 1921, C. W. G. op. cit., Vol. XXII, p. 60.

34. Reading to Montagu, 23 February 1922, Reading Collection, Vol. 4, Letters to Secretary of State, p. 21.

35. Gandhi to Reading, 1 February 1922, Sapru Collection, MSS, Vol. G4, pp. 9-15.

36. An Article of Krishnadas under the caption, 'A Piece of History Excavated', dated Calcutta, 6 June 1923, which appeared in *The Voice of India*, 12. 6. 1923, quoted in Jayakar, Vol. I. see p. 512.

[Reading's] main purpose in making the offer had been to avoid a boycott of the Prince of Wales in Calcutta."³⁷

Subhas Bose has also observed that when Deshbandhu 'broached' the matter to 'the younger section' of the prisoners, they, including himself, at first 'vehemently opposed' the move for a compromise and the withdrawal of the struggle. But after 'elaborate discussion' Deshbandhu 'convinced' them that the move suited the interests of the Congress and was a step towards fulfilment of Gandhi's promise of Swaraj. Das argued that "the Round Table Conference might or might not be a success, but if it failed and the Government refused to concede the popular demands, the Congress could resume the fight at any time".³⁷⁴

The difference between Gandhi and Das in this matter was twofold. Gandhi had grave doubts about the success of the conference. He thus wrote in *Young India* : "In my opinion, such a Conference is bound to prove abortive till Lord Reading is disabused of the idea that non-co-operation is confined to a few misguided zealots" and "unless Government changes its attitude about the fundamental grievances ... and is prepared to yield to the express wish of the people".³⁸ Reading also wrote cynically to Montagu : "I see little to come from the conference ..."³⁹ The Viceroy thought there would be no 'complete agreement, which was in my opinion the inevitable result of the conference ...'⁴⁰ These statements reveal that neither Reading nor Gandhi was optimistic that the Conference was likely to be fruitful. This was contrary to

37. Azad, op. cit., p. 15; See also Das's undelivered Ahmedabad Congress Presidential address, 1921, Quoted in H. N. Dasgupta, op. cit., p. 155.

37A. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 100; Gitasree Bandopadhyay's comment (*Constraints in Bengal Politics, 1921-41, Gandhian Leadership*, Calcutta 1984, p. 63) that Das wanted to come to terms with the Viceroy as he "required the time for necessary preparations" for the council elections, seems pointless as the elections were far off in December 1921 and there is no question of its preparations then. The Council issue then paled into insignificance before the surging tide of mass movement.

38. *Young India*, 1919-1922, op. cit., 22. 12. 1921, p. 949; *The Indian Mirror*, 22 December 1921.

39. Reading to Montagu, 5 January 1922, Reading Collection, op. cit., p. 3.

40. Reading to Montagu, 28 December 1921, Reading Collection, op. cit., p. 201.

the expectations of Das and others, who thought that even a partial agreement or gain would be a proof of the success of the agitation. Secondly, in the opinion of Das, the withdrawal of the repressive Acts and the release of political prisoners would be considered by the people as a victory for the Congress.⁴¹ Gandhi argued, on the other hand, that as the repressive laws were designed to stifle non-co-operation, its suspension before the withdrawal of those laws would mean a triumph of the bureaucratic strategy.⁴² Thus there was a vital difference between the two lines of approach.

Gandhi's objection to the Conference may be thus summed up. Without specific terms the idea of a Conference was bound to remain nebulous. The cessation of the struggle before the cancellation of Government notifications would amount to a Government victory. A condition for the conference that the civil disobedience prisoners should be released was unsatisfactory as that would leave the Fatwa Prisoners in jail. Lastly, he had little faith in its real success. Apart from the last factor, which had some real basis, a closer scrutiny reveals that Gandhi's first three objections do not rest on solid grounds.

It is wrong to assume that the whole show was "a move on the diplomatic chessboard" sponsored by the tricky Viceroy as there were unfounded misgivings that once his purpose was served Reading would have shelved the conference.⁴³ The Viceroy plainly admitted to the Secretary of State that the acceptance of his conditions would have made withholding of the Conference 'impossible'.⁴⁴ It is also known from Malaviya's Press Statement in 1923 that Lord Reading's Government "was willing to accept" one of Gandhi's terms — settlement of the composition and date of the Conference.⁴⁵ In this context it may safely be held that the date and personnel of the Conference, certainly a relevant point in the course of

41. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 100 ; *The Bengalee*, 12 January, 1923.

42. Krishnadas, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

43. Rajendra Prasad, *Autobiography*, p. 156 ; Krishnadas' article in *The Voice of India*, 12. 6. 1923, quoted in Jayakar, Vol. I, p. 510-511.

44. Reading to Montagu, 5 January 1922 and 23 February 1922, Reading Collection, op. cit., p. 3 and p. 21 respectively.

45. Malaviya's Press Note, dated Amritsar, 30 June 1923, quoted in Krishnadas, op. cit., p. 164.

negotiation, could not have been a stumbling block as Gandhi misunderstood.

Secondly, the withdrawal of the repressive measures and the suspension of Non-co-operation were bound to occur almost simultaneously and hence the point of priority raised by Gandhi was more a technical than a real or vital point. Thirdly, Gandhi can also be faulted on the question of the Ali Brothers, on which he was perhaps too rigid and by placing too much emphasis on this point he played into the hands of Reading. The Ali Brothers were arrested not in connection with civil disobedience activities but with a different issue. Two members of the Viceroy's Executive Council assured Malaviya "that the release of Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali would be agreed to before the conference actually met", if not earlier.⁴⁶ Azad has also stated that Malaviya, after conferring with the Viceroy, informed them "that the Government of India were willing to release all the political prisoners", including the Ali Brothers, "who were to take part in the discussions". Subhas Bose and Sasmal, who were then in the same jail, held the same view.^{46,4} Hence there was good prospect of the release of the Ali Brothers in due course, if not immediately in December 1921. There is, however, scope for doubt if the matter had been clearly conveyed to the Mahatma in such short time and through the exchange of telegrams. Moreover, the absence of the Ali Brothers would not have meant non-representation of the Muslim opinion as attempts were then being made to get the other Muslims leaders to attend the Conference.⁴⁷

Hindu-Muslim relations were then put to strain, as Lord Reading had driven a wedge between Gandhi and the Ali Brothers through

46. Ibid.

46A. Azad, op. cit., p. 15 ; Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 100 ; Birendranath Sasmal, *Sroter Trin*, (A Blade of Grass in the Current) Calcutta, reprinted second edition, 1972, pp. 103-106: This book was written when Sasmal was in Alipore jail in 1921 and first published in 1922. The time and date of the publication gives the book greater authenticity than memoirs of other leaders written long after this episode.

47. Sapru to Hignell, 16 December 1921, Sapru Collection, Mss, Vol XXII. R 290, p. 384.

the apology episode.⁴⁷⁴ The latter's explaining away the apology tendered to the Government for offensive speeches had annoyed Gandhi, who had persuaded them to tender apology to evade prosecution. Gandhi refused to attend the Khilafat Conference at Karachi in July 1921. The arrest of the Ali Brothers in September further embittered the Muslims, who were becoming sceptic about non-co-operation as a solution of the Khilafat problem. All these facts point to the conclusion that accepting the conference could not have worsened the Hindu-Muslim relations as the Khilafat issue would surely have found a place in the agenda of the conference. Hence Gandhi could have displayed here more flexibility by keeping open the door of negotiation as the moment was psychological when there was, in the words of Reading himself, "a general consensus in favour of a conference as the way out of the then situation".⁴⁸

In the next place, Gandhi's promise of Swaraj in a year had created incredible popular enthusiasm and expectations.⁴⁹ The year was coming to a close with the Mahatma's promise remaining unfulfilled. There had so far been only agitation and disturbances. This dismayed "the more sensible" and led them to doubt Gandhi's ability to translate his word into action.⁵⁰ Viewed in this context the opportunity of achieving something 'beyond agitation' was provided by the Round Table proposal. For this reason the proposal was welcome to Das and he wanted to exploit it to the full as a face-saving gesture for the Congress while retaining the right to resume the struggle and expose the British in true colours in case of failure of the talks.⁵¹ The reasoning of Das appears sound in this respect. Secondly, the great reluctance of the British ruling class to withdraw

47A. For this episode see Manju Gopal Mukherjee, 'The Apology Episode', *The Oracle*. Vol. VIII, 1986, No. 2, pp. 10-15.

48. Reading to Montagu, 28 December, 1921, Reading Collection, op. cit., p. 201.

49. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 106; P. Sitaramayya, *The History of Indian National Congress*, New Delhi, 1969, Vol. I, p. 233; See also Government of Bengal, Pol. Department, Pol. Branch, File No. 100/1922, Serial No. 10 and Rushbrook Williams, *India In 1923-1924*, Calcutta 1924, p. 244.

50. Reading to Lloyd George, Simla, 4 May 1922, quoted in Hyde, *Lord Reading*, London, 1967, p. 376.

51. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 100

the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the adverse effect of the Act on the lower classes and the masses, to whom, unlike the elite and bhadrolok youth, Jail was not a badge of honour but a constant source of fear,⁵² also justify Das's contention that such withdrawal would be deemed as a great achievement of the Congress.

Gandhi's resolute stand on his own terms would have been justified if his movement had then been successfully poised. It is a fact that Non-co-operation, though then apparently at its height, was in reality, as Jawaharlal Nehru reflects, "going to pieces".⁵³ Gandhi, who was to abandon it in less than two months, himself admitted that for this ceasefire Chauri Chaura was "the last straw".⁵⁴ By accepting the conference he could have detached vital Moderate support from the Government and saved himself from the impending Bardoli debacle. His action had the reverse effect of alienating the Moderates from him and saving the Government from an embarrassing situation. But a permanent rapport between Gandhi and the Moderates, which D.A. Low thinks, would have been a possible outcome of the Conference, was unlikely because temperamentally and ideologically the Moderates were far away from Gandhi. Judith Brown has shown that the three bases of Gandhi's political power, such as 'newly mobilized groups and areas', Muslim alliance and support of the Presidency political elite, were then collapsing.⁵⁵ In addition, violence and indiscipline were then appearing, and the Muslims losing faith in non-co-operation as a means of obtaining justice on the Turkish question.⁵⁶ The non-violent character of the movement was fast fading, which made Gandhi visibly disturbed. Even the official chronicler admitted this "decline" of the campaign.⁵⁷ Viewed from this angle, Jawaharlal Nehru's comment does not make 'very odd reading', as

52. Government of Bengal, Pol. Department, Political Branch, File No 100/1922, Serial Nos. 7-24; *Young India*, 1919-22, pp. 981-83.

53. Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography*, p. 85.

54. *The Mussalman*, 6 June 1921.

55. Judith Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power, Indian Politics, 1915-22*, Cambridge, 1972, pp. 327-343; See also *The Bombay Chronicle*, 22 March 1923.

56. Rushbrook Williams, *India In 1923-24*, pp. 245-246.

57. *Ibid.*

Sumit Sarkar has alleged.⁵⁸ The Bengal Government sources, of course, did point out that in early 1922 the masses were becoming violent and restless and the peasants were not afraid to defy the authority and even the leaders.⁵⁹ In the United Provinces also there was considerable agrarian discontent throughout 1921.⁶⁰ But it has not yet been proved that the discontented masses all over India were defiant and organised enough to be fit for a successful popular upsurge. Referring to the movement as it was then conducted, Jawaharlal observed, "All organisation and discipline was disappearing, almost all our good men were in prison, and the masses had so far received little training to carry on by themselves" :

The Government was also then in a dilemma, being sandwiched between a steady withdrawal of moderate support, which was perilous for the fate of the reforms, and the challenge of civil disobedience. It was also hard pressed to save the Prince's Calcutta trip. Das felt the need for urgency because he knew that this crisis would not last as the Prince's tour was coming to an end. It had always been an axiom of Das that a crisis should be exploited to strike a bargain and to make each gain a base for further advance.⁶¹ Hence, under the exigencies of the situation, grasping the chance of a political bargain, whatever it was, as Das wished, would not have been inexpedient. The Congress had nothing to lose, but something to gain by the Conference, which even in its failure would have discredited the British. Montagu sensed this when he observed, "... a Conference which fails is

58. Sumit Sarkar, *'Popular' Movements and 'Middle Class' Leadership in Late Colonial India : Perspectives and Problems of a "History from Below"*, Calcutta, 1983, p. 50.

59. Government of Bengal, Political (Confidential), File 394, Serial Nos. 1-3 of 1914, p. 13, quoted in S. Sarkar, op. cit., p. 89 ; See also Ronaldshay to Montagu, 12 January 1922, Zetland Collection, MSS, Eur. D. 609-4 and P. C. Bamford, *Histories of Non-co-operation & Khilafat Movement*, Govt. of India, Home Deptt. (pol.) File 185/1925, pp. 73-82.

60. Government of India, Home Department (Pol), File 63/June 1921 ; Sukhbir Choudhury, *Peasants' And Workers' Movement in India 1905-1929*, Delhi, 1971, pp. 96-97 ; J. Nehru, op. cit., p. 85.

61. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 158.

infinitely worse than no Conference at all".^{61A} D. A. Low aptly observes, "In the circumstances of the time it is difficult to doubt that this would have caused the British enormous embarrassment : it would have brought (as C. R. Das understood) a considerable moral victory to the non-co-operation movement ...".⁶²

But this moral victory is to be distinguished from concrete material success and it is here that D. A. Low can be faulted, as his observation that a Round Table Conference "could very well have secured substantial constitutional concessions"⁶³ appears to be an unjustifiable hypothesis in view of the none too responsive attitude of Lord Reading and the British Cabinet. To regard the proposal as "the chance of a lifetime",⁶⁴ as Das thought, was a wishful thinking as he misread British intentions, just as he failed to read Birkenhead later.

Thus it is evident from this analysis that both Das and Gandhi were in their own ways partially right but not wholly correct in their assessment of the situation. The party of Das and a section of the Congress were greatly disappointed at the failure of the move. Das felt very sore indeed and his deep resentment is recorded by Azad and Subhas Bose.⁶⁵ Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, a close associate of Das, has also recorded that Das felt so dejected that he spent a sleepless night at the Alipore Jail and repeatedly grumbled, 'The whole thing has been bungled'.⁶⁶ Shyamsundar Chakravarti also stated that he was 'moved' to see that Das broke down so badly at Gandhi's rejection of the Viceroy's terms, so that he acceded to Das's request to send a wire to Gandhi in favour of Das's proposals,

61A. Montagu to Reading, Private telegram, 20 December, 1921, quoted in Low, op. cit., p. 249.

62. D.A. Low, op. cit., p. 257 ; See also Judith Brown, who holds similar views, op. cit., pp. 347-348.

63. D.A. Low, op. cit., Low's article contains mostly the references of the exchange of telegrams between Montagu and Reading, but does not refer to many vital letters, passed between the Viceroy and the Secretary of State (mentioned in this article), which make the attitude of the British rulers clear.

64. Subhas Bose, op. cit., p. 101.

65. *Ibid*, *The Bengalee*, 12 January 1923 ; Azad, op. cit., p. 15.

66. Hemanta Kumar Sarkar, *Deshbandhusmriti*, Calcutta, 1941, p. 41.

not on his personal account, but in name of Bengal, although he personally knew that Bengal feeling as represented by the Congress delegates, bound for Ahmedabad, was not uniformly in favour of withdrawal of hartal.⁶⁷ Das's strong reaction in the Madras speech in 1923⁶⁸ in which he made bitter remarks about Gandhi's blunder in this episode were the reminiscences of that scar.

Thus the failure of the Round Table negotiations and the sudden withdrawal of civil disobedience soon after by Gandhi left bitter marks not only on C. R. Das but on history. The possibilities of the proposed conference have been over-estimated by some historians, although the conference, had it come off, could have changed the course of events, if not history. It revealed the differences between two styles of leadership represented by Gandhi and Das. While the former rigidly adhered to his moral principles, the latter took a more flexible and realistic view of the situation while accepting the proposal of the conference. Das's leadership is described by Subhas Bose as 'rationalist', whereas the Gandhian leadership was a mixture of religion and politics. The Round Table negotiations were a factor in the manifold differences between Gandhi and Das, which ultimately culminated in the Swarajist revolt against the Gandhian leadership.

67. S. Chakravarti's statement—"A Confession of Weakness", *The Servant*, 19 June 1923, and see also his telegram to Gandhi, Calcutta, 20. 12. 1921, *C.W.G.*, Vol. XXII, pp. 59-60.

68. G. I., Home Dept. (Political), 'Fortnightly Report on Internal Political Situation in India', File 25/1923, Bombay, 1st half of July.

NINETEENTH CENTURY BANKING AND BUSINESS IN INDIA

RAJAT KANTA RAY

The State Bank of India opened its archives to Professor Amiya Kumar Bagchi on the oath of secrecy administered to its officers and commissioned him to write a history of the bank from its inception as the Bengal of Bengal. Its holdings include the records of the Bank of Bengal (opened in 1806 as the Bank of Calcutta and renamed Bank of Bengal in 1808), the Bank of Madras (opened in 1843), and the New Bank of Bombay (set up in 1868 upon the collapse of the Bank of Bombay in 1867). The records of the Bank of Bombay (1840-1867) have been lost. The present volume, published in two parts,¹ brings the early history of the bank down to 1876, when the Bank of Bengal, the New Bank of Bombay and the Bank of Madras were brought under the Presidency Banks Act and the New Bank of Bombay was once again renamed the Bank of Bombay. The subsequent reincarnations of the three Presidency Banks as the Imperial Bank of India in 1921 and the State Bank of India in 1955 will be traced in further volumes that are yet to be written. A team of collaborators, drawn from Grade One officers of the State Bank, and a couple of Research Assistants in London, helped Professor Bagchi in gathering material not merely from the records preserved in the bank's head offices and branches, but also from the India Office Library and the Public Records Office in London, the National Archives in New Delhi, the State Archives in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Hyderabad and Allahabad, the High Courts of Calcutta and Bombay and Madras, the Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy Papers in Bombay University and other sources.

Research on this scale has not been done in Indian banking and business history before. As is to be expected from the vast resources

1 Amiya Kumar Bagchi, *The Evolution of the State Bank of India. The Roots 1806-1876* (Oxford University Press, Bombay 1987), Part I *The Early Years 1806-1860*, pp. 535, Part II *Diversity and Regrouping 1860-1876*, pp. 515, two volume set Rs. 300.

deployed by the State Bank the work is rich in detail, and, because it has happily been written by a single author, it is firm in conceptual focus. The references to the sources which are open to the public are meticulous ; but as regards the holdings of the State Bank of India, the author, departing from standard historical practice, resolved not to give specific references to the documents in the footnotes, since the records have no archival order or numbering and are in any case closed to the public. Every historian will earnestly wish that the State Bank will put its historical records open for research and that the author will give specific references to the dates and other particulars of the bank minutes and documents in the forthcoming volumes.¹

The nineteenth century economy

Ideally, as the author says, the history of the Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras should delineate the economic evolution of India as it determined the nature of the business of these banks. On account of the immensity of the task, this is expressly stated to be out of the purview of the work at the start. In passing, however, Bagchi does make illuminating observations upon the general characteristics of the nineteenth century colonial economy, mostly on the basis of sources other than the records of the banks. He also keeps out of his purview the development of the mercantile community which supported and benefited from the Bengal, Bombay and Madras Banks, and the impact these banks had on the structure of the trading classes. Despite this disavowal, his interspersed comments, based on the records of the banks, give a more authentic view of the development of the European mercantile community than we have had so far. His treatment of the Indian merchant communities, which also developed relations with the banks, is not so detailed. This may reflect the fact that the European business houses were far more closely interwoven with the three banks than the Indian banking and trading firms. The absence of specific

1 The absence of archival numbering can be overcome by specific reference to the minute book, the date of the minute, the author and date of a report, the author and recipient and date of a letter, etc. This will be useful even if the State Bank archives remain closed for the present

references to the bank records rules out an assessment of the frequency with which European and Indian merchants figured in the dealings and credit ratings of the banks.

Henry Tucker, Accountant-General of the Government of Bengal, was the man who conceived the Bank of Calcutta. An exponent of free trade and a critic of Company monopoly, he had an acute insight into the depressing effect of Company rule on the Indian economy. As early as 1789, we find him making four important points in this connection : (1) there was no longer so great a consumption of the valuable articles of produce as under the 'Musulman Government' ; (2) the revenue collected from the land was no longer 'circulated and retained in the country' ; (3) European individuals remitted their private fortunes to England and other parts and thus 'drained' the country of its specie ; (4) the Company monopolized important branches of trade and there was no perfect equality of trade in any of its branches. These early features of colonialism which spasmodically deflated and depressed the Indian economy by draining it of specie — there was for instance a general depression from which a large part of India suffered between 1830 and the 1850's¹ — were accompanied from around 1830 by a deliberate deindustrialization by discriminating duties against which, interestingly, the educated Hindus of Calcutta protested in 1832. They are mentioned (Vol I, p. 162) as having submitted a petition in that year pleading in vain against the discriminating policies of the Government of Britain under which imports of all kinds of foreign manufacture into India were encouraged, while exports of Indian manufactured goods were discouraged by a system of prohibitory duties within the country and in England. The triumph of the free traders over the Company monopolists in 1813 and 1833 had resulted merely in allowing free trade to England without permitting to India a free trade for herself. By the time internal duties were fully removed within India and a perfectly free two-way oceanic traffic was established between the colony and the metropolitan country, India was already integrated into the capitalist world economy of the First Industrial

1 Bagchi mentions this in Vol II, p. 91 (hence II, 91) without offering a description and an explanation.

Nation as its producer of raw materials and its market for industrial products. At that stage, free trade itself became detrimental to her growth.

Railway construction in the 1860, lifted the Indian economy out of the prolonged depression of the second third of the nineteenth century, but as Bagchi points out (ii, 91), a very large portion of the sums spent on the railways leaked abroad as payments for imported engines, rolling stock, track materials and salaries of European managers and technicians. Nor, adds Bagchi (I, 358) were the huge sums of investment for railway building mobilized in India, which might have stimulated the money and capital markets in the country. Much of the benefit was drained away by British industry and the London money market, and the real stimulus to local trade, banking and industry was much smaller than the total railway investment figures indicated. The development of the export trade, stimulated by improved steamship navigation and railways, did lead to the emergence of specialized blocks of cash crops areas and new channels of trading outlet : the Berar cotton tract with its line to Bombay, the jute areas of East Bengal with the Calcutta connection, the Punjab Canal Colonies with their wheat and cotton outlet to Karachi, the Krishna-Godavari delta through Coconada, the Tambraparni valley (Tirunelveli) through Tuticorin, the coffee plantations of the Nilgiris through Cochin and so on (II, 378). Overall, the stimulating effects and the integration of the production zones and trading channels were patchy and partial. Citing A. K. Ghosh's London thesis, 'An Analysis of the Indian Price Structure from 1861' (1949), Bagchi contends that the railways did little to iron out the inter-regional differences in the prices of various agricultural commodities (II, 67). In his view, the margin obtained by traders and the lack of adequate connections between points within the land mass of India allowed few of the potential benefits of the spread of the railways to the people living at the level of subsistence (for a contrary interpretation which Bagchi does not take up for refutation, see the chapters by John Hurd and Michelle MacAlpin in the *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol II).

Of course, the railways running to the ports did bring the prices of exportable commodities in the major internal marts within the

orbit of influence of the capitalist world economy. The effects were not always beneficial for the subsistence economies in the interior. The jump in the prices of raw cotton upon the outbreak of the American Civil War, for instance, caused acute distress among the already hard-pressed weaving communities, so much so that we find several wealthy Parsees from Bombay subscribing Rs. 80,000 for the relief of the hungry weavers of Conjeevaram in 1863. The Madras Chamber of Commerce, which unfeelingly argued that 'the distressed population should be left to Adam Smith', was sharply criticized in the Indian press for talking of Adam Smith and the natural laws of demand and supply in the face of famishing humanity (II, 370). Upon the whole, however, the peasant and artisan communities showed an unexpected capacity in the long run to adjust their subsistence economies and to compete with the foreign planters, manufacturers and corporations. The framework of the rural economy, despite severe strain, did not give way in all parts : on the contrary, Bagchi exhibits European planters being undercut by the Indian farmers in the growing of sugarcane and being forced to take to refining the gur (jaggery) produced by the latter (II, p. 85, n35). The over-all effects are summed up by him in a thought provoking section on the post-Mutiny economy entitled 'the vulnerability of the modernization drive' :

The tributary exactions of the state and the operations of the international economy drained away the surplus of the Indian peasantry and destroyed the livelihood of Indian artisans, and many of the 'commercialized' regions showed signs of renewed regression to subsistence patterns of cultivation. The extension of the market and moneylending network, with only an eye to private profit and revenues of a colonial state, interfered with the ecological balance of a slow-moving economy. Unfavourable climatic factors then led to disastrous famines... Indiscriminate exploitation by colonial methods set up an unresolved and a continually-reproduced duality between forced commercialization and reversion to subsistence. At the same time, forced integration of the Indian economy into the international capitalist framework led to an unlooked-for fragmentation of the economic space and to the severance of many existing links

between internal modes of trade and finance when these came into conflict with the dominant links along the rivers, roads and railways leading to the ports (II, 82).

Given the repeated reversion to subsistence, the fragility of the new markets opened up by the railways and the steamships and the low level of internal consumption and demand, it is not surprising that safe and remunerative investments with predictable rates of return were hard to find, a problem that confronted both the modern banks and the bazaar bankers. Far from capital being scarce, it was, on the contrary, plentiful; but paradoxically, money at the level of 'apex banking' was by no means cheap, for the risks were high. We find the bank of Madras actually trying to reduce the number of deposits on which it had to pay interest around 1873, a sure sign that there was not enough employment for its funds at attractive rates (II, 399). Bagchi convincingly demonstrates here his earlier thesis regarding the Indian economy between 1900-1939, i.e., that the constraints on growth lay not in the supply of capital, but in the narrow demand for goods which constricted the market.

Evolution of the modern banking and business structure.

Using the bank records, Bagchi gives a rich outline of the evolution of the modern, mainly European, banking and business structure in India. The end of the Company's monopoly in 1813 left the field to the private European agency houses, which achieved an abnormally inflated growth until the crash of 1833 by drawing on capital provided by European civil servants and military personnel out of their savings and by rich Bengali banians associated with the agency houses. An important point arising from his research is the much greater damage done to the accumulations of Bengali capital compared to the damage to European savings by the crash of 1833. European partners, who knew what was coming, were able to use their greater knowledge of the law to escape from liabilities, while their Bengali banians, from whom the Bank of Bengal later on ruthlessly extracted every pie, were taken by surprise. Bengali enterprise, which from the start was based on association with the Europeans and had no independent base like that of the Hindustani and Marwari bankers, suffered an even more damaging blow in

the crash of 1848, in which the Union Bank, pioneered by Dwarkanath Tagore in association with several European partners, collapsed. Its demise left the Bank of Bengal in entire possession of the field of modern banking and the few surviving European firms in virtual control of the direction of that bank. Bengalis, who had earlier figured prominently as borrowers of the Bank of Bengal (I, 118-126), were virtually eliminated from its business (I, 217), and as the Bengali component of the bank's business declined, the bank's *khazanchi*, a figure of earlier importance, became a cipher (II, 73-75).

With the Bengalis nearly but not quite eliminated from the higher branches of modern business, the next stage witnessed the growth of the exchange banks (of which the Union Bank was in a sense the earliest example) and the European managing agencies. A few Bengali firms that acted as *Banian* to several European firms at one and the same time, such as Prawn Kissen Law & Co., and R. G. Ghosh & Company (the firm of Ramgopal Ghosh), still persisted in the 1860's (II, 70-71). But increasingly immigrant Marwari and Bania banking and trading firms from upper and central India, which dealt in *hundis* and had *kothis* spread all over the Gangetic valley and the Deccan, established their dominance in those branches of inland business left to the Indians. Bansilal Abirchand and Tarachand Ghanshyamdas, for instance, appear prominently in Thacker's Calcutta directory in 1864, their advantage being much quicker flow of information, a more diversified portfolio of clients and commodities, and possession of independent channels of trade and finance for inland trade (II, 70, 72).

It was, however, the exchange banks and the European managing agencies that attained the commanding heights of the Indian economy in the 1860's and the 1870's, and thus came to account for the best part of the business transacted by the semi-government Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the East India Company transacted the exchange and remittance business of India with China and England, but as its monopoly slackened, exchange banks, operating on royal charters, came to dominate this important field of business (I, 354, 477). Some of these exchange banks were originally incorporated in India

with Indian participation, but they shifted their headquarters to London within a few years and passed out of Indian participation (I, 359, II, 88). In 1862 the Secretary of State, Wood, formally closed foreign exchange business to the Bank of Bengal, and so the Oriental Bank, the Chartered Bank of England, Australia and China and other exchange banks operating on royal charters were left in possession of the field (II, 24). These banks, as Dickson (Secretary of the Bank of Bengal) noted in 1867, had ramified connections in the seaports, of India, the Straits, China, Australia, Japan, California and elsewhere, but their Indian branches kept their cash reserves with the Presidency Banks, both as a convenience and on the ground of economy (II, 258). During the tight season in the money market, the exchange banks reckoned on the assistance of the Presidency Banks which, by virtue of holding the cash balances of the government, had the largest amount of reserves in the country to operate with (II, 314). Thus a tight and delicate connection sprang up between the produce exporting traders, the exchange banks and the Presidency banks : the Berar commission agents (adatiyas), who acted for the Bombay export firms, for instance, sold their bills upon the Bombay export merchants to the local branch of the New Bank of Bombay upon despatching cotton by rail from Berar to Bombay ; the Bombay export merchants, upon receiving and shipping the cotton, sold their bills in turn to the exchange banks (which collected the bills in London), and used the proceeds to meet their previous engagements to the New Bank of Bombay ; the New Bank, finally, helped out the exchange banks while the cotton trade was at its peak till the season was over and the exchange banks had collected in London. The Directors of the New Bank of Bombay, referring to 'the delicate network of credit on which the trade of the port is conducted', deemed it their duty 'to prevent, by every means in their power, a strain so severe as to cause a break in any one link in the chain, a break the consequences of which it is impossible to estimate' (II, 316).

Along with the exchange banks, which financed the export-import trade of India, there also sprang into prominence a set of managing agencies which proved to be the main customers of these banks in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Firms such as Ritchie Steuart & Company; with which the financial wizard Premchand

was closely associated, waxed fat in the Bombay cotton and share boom of the American Civil War, and for some time Bombay even outstripped Calcutta in the volume of its exports and imports. But the crash of 1866, in which Premchand became bankrupt, Ritchie Steuart failed all but in name, and the Bank of Bombay collapsed ignominiously, once again made Calcutta the leading colonial port city. Bombay did not lose all its capital accumulations of the extraordinary years before the end of the American Civil War : Indian firms took the lead in floating cotton mills in the next period, but European firms increased their grip over the export trade in raw cotton. Calcutta, which around the same time developed jute, tea and coal enterprises under European direction, witnessed what Bagchi calls a virtual 'reconquest of the hinterland by British mercantile capital' (II, 63). The beneficiaries were European managing agencies, such as Jardine, Skinner & Co., George Henderson & Co., and Bird & Co., which engaged in a wide variety of activities (II, 72). The Bank of Bengal, unlike the old Bank of Bombay, gave more effective support to the credit structure of Calcutta by its sounder management, which helped overcome a mercantile crisis in 1866 that developed independently of the simultaneous crisis in Bombay and in which the Agra and United Service Bank perished. Madras had a much smaller component of business and industry compared to Calcutta and Bombay, but a variety of activities, such as curing of coffee, agency of the shipping and insurance companies and the exchange banks, and refining of country-made gur, sustained the established European firms, such as Arbuthnot & Co., Parry and Co. and Binny & Co.

The completion of a railway network reaching far into the interior, the development of the steamship services through the Suez Canal and the linking up of the inland telegraph and the great overseas cable systems fundamentally altered the conditions of India's trade with other countries in the 1870's, giving a systematic advantage to European firms against Indian competitors. As the *Times of India* observed on 24 October 1872, 'in these days, when the course of trade between Europe and India may be said to average little more than six weeks, and when the telegraph permits of the completion of transactions within as many days as months were formerly required, international trade demands, and in some

cases receives, a mode of treatment which in precision and promptitude resembles scientific operations' (II, p. 329, n5). Not surprisingly export-import firms with headquarters in London now began to engross an increasing share of India's trade by mastering these 'scientific operations': from 1870, significantly, the future giants of Indian exports, Ralli and Volkart, begin to loom large in the credit ratings of the Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras. In December 1870, the twelve European partnerships that enjoyed a credit rating of 3 lakhs included Ralli Brothers. Volkart Brothers had a borrowing limit of Rs. 2 lakhs, but next year its rating was raised to 3 lakhs as well.

The Presidency Banks were excluded by the law from sharing in the foreign exchange operations and the financing of the new scientific international trade of India, which became the exclusive preserve of the great exchange banks stretching out their tentacles from London to the Far East. Nor did a move for merger between the Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, after the collapse of the old Bank of Bombay, get off the ground on account of the jealousies between the mercantile (predominantly European) communities of Calcutta and Bombay. However, a rigid standardization was imposed on the three banks under the Presidency Banks Act of 1876, which subjected their custody of government balances and their advances to borrowers to stringent limits. 'Thus', writes bagchi, 'it came about that though the Presidency Banks were accorded a privileged position by virtue of their special relationship with the government they had to pay for this privilege by accepting any restrictions on their activities. Their position was, in many ways, similar to the ladies of the *jenana* of an Indian prince. They had a high status, they were protected, but they were not allowed out of the boundaries of the *jenana* walls.' (II, 454).

Transformations in the money market

The Presidency banks and the exchange banks represented a modern western sector in the money market of India, as distinct from the 'bazaar', a pre-existing indigenous money market which was also well organized and integrated under its own distinct principles ('apex banking' and 'bazaar banking', II, 455-6). The emergence of

the 'apex' or 'central' money market (as the Indian Central Banking Enquiry Committee later described it in 1931) should have made money cheaper, and imposed greater uniformity over its rates. As a matter of fact it made money dearer, and the uniformity it promoted in rates was confined to certain limited sections.

Confronted by a variety of cowries[◇] and native gold and silver coins on which the shroffs charged batta, the British resolved in 1835 to impose a uniform silver and copper currency all over India to facilitate the operations of colonial trade and tax collection. But instead of supplying an increased volume of their own currency to supply all needs, they resorted to huge demonetizations of other currencies to achieve uniformity, severely deflating the economy in the process. Even so, the completion of the process, which caused many dislocations in the country and was at least partly responsible for the prolonged depression in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, took an inordinately long time, and was not really achieved until the coming of the railways. As late as 1863, Farrukhabad rupees were still in wide circulation in Hindustan, and such was the scarcity of government rupees that the Bank of Bengal in Mirzapore unashamedly and quite contrary to government interests speculated, like the bazaar shroffs, in Farrukhabad rupees, a medium, it may be noted, that greatly impeded the paper notes just introduced by the government (II, 174-175). The railways by providing cheaper transport of government coins finally drove out the Farrukhabad rupees and other native coins in British territory.

As regards paper notes, the issue of which along with the control of currency was taken in 1860 from the Bank of Bengal and vested in the Controller of currency, 'home' and 'foreign' circles persisted through the 1870's and the notes of one circle were not interchangeable with another at par. Paper notes were issued from Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Allahabad, Lahore and other circles. Since the public had not yet accepted paper notes freely, the treasuries in each circle were obliged to change notes of their own circle for coins up to a certain amount. Thus they could hardly afford to change notes of other circles freely for fear of running out of coin reserves. The cost of transporting specie, especially to outstations like Dacca, where railways did not run yet, made it impossible in every case to

change notes to coins, and hence a discount had to be paid for cashing, say, Allahabad notes in Calcutta, or Bombay notes in Lahore. However, the development of steamshipping and railways slowly brought down the cost of transporting coins, for example between Madras and Calcutta in the early 1870's, and ultimately made paper notes current at par all over the country (II, 437-9). As might be expected under this system, the government treasuries, rather than the Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, were the most important agency in money flows from one part of the country to another, a function performed by a gigantic system of treasury bills drawn one upon another (I, 396).

Despite the increasing volume of movements of money — through treasury bills as well as hundis — between different parts of the country, the money markets in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras were still to achieve any marked correspondence in rates before the 1860's. As Bullen, a director of the Bank of Bengal, observed in 1860, the rates of interest and discount throughout Britain were governed by those current in London, whereas in India the value of money or the rates of discount at the three Presidencies were rarely the same. Because of these wide differences in rates caused by the special conditions of inland trade in each of the Presidencies, a proposal by Dickson to impose a uniform rate of exchange to be operated by the Banks Bengal, Madras and Bombay carried no conviction (II, 92-94). Interestingly, though, the volume of hundis moving between Calcutta, Bombay and Madras was already sufficiently large for Dickson to moot the idea that the three banks could cash in on — the business of discounting first class hundis and thus achieve a closer business connection. Bagchi concludes from the evidence that by the latter part of the 1860's, a greater uniformity was achieved in the prime rates charged by the three Presidency Banks. This was due to the spread of branches of the banks and to better communications which brought down the cost of transporting specie and goods and thus reduced the margin of spread in the cost of money and credit between the three colonial port cities. But the spread of the branches of the banks, while integrating the trade of the Presidency towns with one another and of the hinterland with each Presidency town, did not have any real impact yet on the internal trade between different points within the interior. Hence

the bazaar rates, or the rates of discount on the hundis financing the trade of the interior, did not follow the bank rates. Nor were the usurious rates of credit at the bottom of society least affected by the spread of modern banking (II, 457-8).

Not only were the rates charged by the Presidency banks high and fluctuating when compared to those of the Banks of England, but the bank rates showed no distinct improvement upon the bazaar rates. Though Bagchi does not discuss the long term movements in the cost of money and credit, he cites figures and facts that point indeed in a contrary direction. There was a distinct increase in the interest and discount rates of the Bank of Bengal in 1846-47 which more or less became permanent (I, 178-181, 188-205). Again, the rates prevalent in the 1860's seem to have been distinctly lower than those obtaining at the beginning of the twentieth century (II, 96). In Bombay, similarly, the rates on private bills were lower and less fluctuating when the Bank of Bombay was opened in 1840 than twenty years after ; following the Mutiny, the rates of the Bank of Bombay increased both in pitch and fluctuation (I, 327ff).¹ As for the Madras Presidency, the rates charged by the Bank of Madras in the Presidency town itself was higher, in 1863, than the rates quoted by bazaar bankers in Cochin. As the inspector of the branch reported back to Madras, 'it is out of the question to suppose that the merchants will do their business at exorbitant rates with us when they can do it for one or one and a half per cent less in the bazaar .. ' (II, 375).

The banks and the bazaar

Interesting snippets of information about Indian bankers and traders come up in course of Bagchi's narrative of the dealings of the Presidency Banks, but the treatment is less detailed and satisfactory than his explorations of European business. The banks were acutely aware of the huge, sprawling and seemingly impenetrable world of the bazaar, and of the implications of its fluctuations for their own modern style business. Thus Dickson of the Bank of Bengal wrote in 1867 :

1 These long term trends require explanation Bagchi is yet to provide one.

The usages, customs and habits of the people of this country, who are a nation of traffickers in money as well as in the inland exchanges, are opposed to the rapid growth of purely Western customs and institutions. They must retain in their hands, against all competitors, by far the largest portion of purely Banking operations in India, and legislation cannot possibly reach them. They have sufficient influence, either by active combination or passive inaction, to defeat any movement of the kind, unless indeed they find that it subserves their own interests (II, 258).

Bagchi cites some instances of such active combination, or more commonly passive inaction, by the Indian bankers to resist the white outsiders' measures they did not like. But despite the strong resistance of the bankers to any novel interference in their own sphere of operations, over which they managed to preserve a jealous autonomy, their place in the over-all banking and monetary system of the country was insensibly and sometimes consciously redefined by the colonial economic power. In the process an unequal symbiosis developed between the Western banks and monetary institutions and the Indian bankers and merchants. The Indian bankers, who had never managed to develop an extensive system of public deposits to augment their capital resources, had previously mobilized their capital by handling the revenues of the Mughal successor states of the eighteenth century, to which they had served as treasurers, bankers, revenue securities, coin exchangers, army suppliers and financial advisers (I, 30-31). They lost their access to the revenue resources of the state when the British having captured state power, organized a new system of public treasuries and banks. In the absence of a developed system of public deposits, the removal of state support for the indigenous banking system everywhere, except in the surviving princely states such as Baroda, Hyderabad, Malwa and Rajputana, was a serious matter for the bankers. As Holt Mackenzie observed in a note in 1926: 'For beyond the narrow sphere of European commerce it is the misery of India that its wealth is, generally speaking, frittered away into portions too minute to be available for extensive commercial enterprises so that its actual capital scarcely exceeds the amount which its bankers and merchants have themselves acquired and that

there is no general system of credit by which the petty loans of individuals might be drawn into congregated masses.' (I, 162)).

Holt Mackenzie perhaps overemphasized the constraints on the capital supply of the bazaar. The bazaar operated through discountable hundis which circulated freely from hand to hand and represented in their aggregate circulation a considerable volume of credit transfers that certainly met the expanding needs of the burgeoning inland trade of India due to the improved communications of the nineteenth century. It was on this expanding sphere of inland trade and the financing of crop movements that Indian bankers and merchants concentrated in the nineteenth century after their withdrawal from the lucrative sphere of state finance. This was part of the sectoral readjustment of the entire economy under the colonial dispensation. In the process older bankers who had financed native political regimes (such as the Jagat Seths) or the hegemonic wars of the East India Company (such as Gopaldas Manohardas) faded from the scene and were replaced by new Marwari, Multani and Bania bankers (most prominently the Poddars of Ramgarh who owned Tarachand Ghanyshyamdas in Calcutta and the Nagpur-based firm of Bansilal Abirchand hailing from Bikaner) who forged long distance credit and trade connections along the new lines of communications. This transition from the older to the newer set of bankers is an obscure aspect of Indian banking history on which the State Bank records might throw tangential light, but it is an aspect Bagchi does not dwell upon. However, his material does throw occasional light on the development of the new indigenous banking and trading network of the nineteenth century. An interesting aspect of this development was the growth of a system of forward trading in the inland exchanges of nineteenth century India. From evidence cited from Mr. Fawcett of Bombay in 1849, it appears that time bargains were rife in Malwa, Ahmedabad and Bombay on the rise and fall of opium sales in Calcutta, and apparently speculation was systematic in 'all the other leading objects of trade except grain' (II, p. 224, n 26). On this evidence the last named commodity does not appear to have entered inland forward trading before the end of the nineteenth century.

In their redefined sphere the Indian bankers and merchants were integrated into the new colonial economic structure, and despite occasional conflicts a structural symbiosis developed over time between the Presidency banks and the bazaar bankers. The bankers were left in possession of their own autonomous sphere of credit operations, which afforded a good business to the Presidency banks through the discounting of native hundis in the Khazanchee's department at headquarters and later on at the inland branches (II, 455-6). Many leading Indian bankers served as Khazanchees at the branches of the Presidency banks: Bansilal Abirchand at Bombay and Amritsar, Gokuldass Gopaldass at Banaras and Nagpur, Lala Sheoprasad at Cawnpore and Lucknow, and so on (II, 189-90). From the laying down of explicit regulations by the Bank of Bengal about the discounting of hundis in the Khazanchee's branch in 1841, it appears that this had long become a regular component of its business at headquarters (I, 500). The business expanded further when the Bank of Bengal opened branches at Banaras, Mirzapore, Patna and Dacca in 1863. Mirzapore, initially the biggest of the branches, regularly dealt in first class hundis worth thousands upon Calcutta and even Madras (II, 176). Similarly the Bank of Bombay had so extensive dealings in hundis that in 1871 it formed a separate 'native bill department' under a head shroff who supervised a Translator of Marwari Hundis and a Translator of Multani and Sindhi Hundis, a sure sign that Marwari and Multani hundis had become a critical component of Bombay business and trade by this time (II, 322-323). Small wonder that a depression in the bazaar immediately affected the profits of the Presidency banks. Thus we find in the report of the Bank of Bengal for the second half of 1872: '... in the bazaars in the interior this unsatisfactory state of affairs prevailed to a greater extent than at any former period since the opening of the branches, the profits of which (were) in consequence materially affected' (II, 124).

Before the Controller of Currency took over the issue of paper notes, the Banks of Bengal and Bombay had introduced a considerable volume of notes which circulated upcountry from Calcutta and Bombay. The shroffs played a key role in circulating the notes in the limited sphere for which they were intended, i.e., the larger commercial transactions. In the credit crisis of 1827 when several

firms failed in Calcutta, the Calcutta shroffs met together to decide whether they would accept the bank notes. Their positive decision eased the tight credit situation, but this may have caused additional losses to the Indian merchants and bankers in the crash of 1833 (I, 134). In 1851 a stop payment notice following the theft of Rs 1 lakh worth of Bank of Bombay notes caused consternation among the Bombay shroffs. They met the bank's secretary in a body and pleaded that as the numbers of the cancelled notes were printed in English and not in the vernacular, their upcountry correspondents might receive these notes innocently and lose money. The Bank of Bombay, which relied on the shroffs for the note circulation, assured them that innocent holders would not be refused payment, nor subjected to police prosecution (I, 345).

There were other signs of the adaptability of the Indian bankers and merchants to the new business environment created by the Raj. Firms such as Tarachand Ghanshyamdas and Bansilal Abirchand, listed as Native Bankers in Thackers' Directory of 1864, were all India firms with kothis spread around the country. Such network firms, which arose from migrations by enterprising merchant communities in the nineteenth century, were in the best position to take advantage of the railways and telegraph introduced around mid-century. This represented a process of concentration in the indigenous world of business and finance. In Khandesh, for instance, the local traders lost a good deal of their business to the immigrant Marwaris and the Bombay Bhatias, who were described in the Gazetteer as 'larger-minded, stronger and harder working than the local traders, and unlike them, masters of the new system of trade by rail and wire' (II, p. 328, n1). The system of integrated forward trading that now developed in the inland exchanges was largely in the hands of such mobile merchant communities. As the new Marwari, Multani, Bhatia and Natukottai Chettiar mercantile and banking networks sprang up across the length and breadth of the country, there were oversea extensions of their financial and mercantile transactions to other countries brought under the sway of British imperialism. Thus we find the Natukottai Chettiars competing with the Moulmein branch (Burma) of the Bank of Bengal in advances to the timber trade in 1875 (II, 170-171). Again, we find the same Chetti bankers quoting lower rates at Tuticorin than the local branch of the Bank of Madras

in 1867 for the collection of drafts of the European agency houses drawn on Colombo (II, 377). The Natukottai Chettiars had already established a strong position in Ceylon by financing that country's imports of rice (II, 415) and in Burma they were destined to go from strength to strength in the financing of exports of surplus rice.

The extension of branch banking by the Presidency banks after the Mutiny brought them into closer contact, and sometimes collision, with the autonomous world of Indian finance and trade. Thus we find the Bellary bankers inviting the Bank of Madras to open a branch in 1864 — no doubt to get access to the greater resources of the bank — while the Bimlipatam 'Chettys', (Beri Chettis ? Komatis ?) who were 'smart, wary people', offered tough competition to the bank in hundis on Calcutta for buying gold to be sent to the interior (II, 376-377). Similarly in the north, the newly opened Lucknow branch of the Bank of Bengal started issuing loans to the Nawabs and Taluqdars with the sowears and shroffs as guarantors (II, 179-180), but the Muzaffarpur branch which had been opened to attract the business of loans to the Tirhoot planters had to be withdrawn in 1874 because of the fierce competition from the native bankers who had so long financed the white planters on the spot (II, 183-185).

On one unique occasion, the shroffs as a class combined both in Bombay and Calcutta to resist a departure from custom by the Bank of Bengal. In 1875 the bank issued notice to the Indian bankers that henceforth it would proceed according to English law in the matter of dishonoured bills, ignoring the custom that the holder of a dishonoured hundi must exhaust the acceptor before turning to other liable people. There was a combination among the shroffs in Calcutta and Bombay, who decided not to sell hundis to the bank. The firms which allegedly led the pan-Indian combination were the bank's own Khazanchees, Bansilal Abirchand at Bombay and Amritsar, and Goculdoss Gopaldoss at Banaras and Mirzapore. The Bombay shroffs were the first to give in. In Calcutta the 'Mahasurry class', i.e., the bankers of the Maheshwari subcaste among the Marwaris, continued to oppose the bank's new policy till the middle of February 1876. Ultimately, however, the Bank of Bengal seems to have prevailed over the shroffs (II, 135).

The Presidency banks did not find the going so easy in the princely states of Indore, Baroda and Hyderabad, where the Indian bankers had strong political connections with the respective darbars to fall back upon. A panchayat composed of the eleven largest banking and trading firms of Indore regulated, under the patronage of the Holkar darbar, all affairs and disputes relating to the shroffs' bazaar. The Gyarah Panch had clear and well understood customs and regulations. Demand hundis were payable at one day's sight. Hundis for acceptance had to be left with the drawee for 3 days if he so required. Even more important, a point, which later gave rise to a dispute with the New Bank of Bombay, hundis unpaid at maturity could not be returned to the remitter until 31 days after due date, to enable the acceptor to pay within that period, if possible (it will be remembered that the defence of the same point produced the pan-Indian combination of the Calcutta-Bombay shroffs against the Bank of Bengal in 1875). If such a contingency arose, it was further stipulated in Indore that the shroffs would pay interest at 6 per cent, and the cloth merchants at 9 per cent, during the period the hundi remained unpaid. In case of hundis being returned unpaid to Indore, interest was chargeable at 9 per cent per annum, and also $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on the sum, to cover re-exchange and costs, other than law charges which were payable separately. In case of dishonour by the drawee, the last endorser only was liable to the holder of a hundi. It was further stipulated by the Gyarah Panch that payment must be made before 12 noon of the day on which it became due, and must be made at the shop of the payee, and not at any bank or shroff's gaddi. These regulations obtained not merely in Indore, but apparently everywhere in India among the bazaar bankers and traders.

When the New Bank of Bombay opened a branch in Indore, the Holkar insisted that it would be subject to the above regulations of the Gyarah Panch (1869). After some wrangling over the well-established rule of the bazaar that an acceptor unable to meet a hundi should get 31 days before it was returned to the remitter, the bank finally arranged with the Gyarah Panch that when hundis were refused acceptance, three days were to be allowed in the first instance before notification was sent to the remitter. The Resident at Indore advised the bank : 'If you fear business here on the system of the

country, you must withdraw. If you elect to remain, resist not that which in the eyes of the people is sounder and simpler than the law courts. Half measures will destroy your influence and business.' The bank, therefore, agreed to the established rule that the last endorser of a hundi only would be liable to the holder of a hundi in case of dishonour by the drawee, but it managed to extract the concession that the shroffs, contrary to previous practice, would affix their signatures to hundis discounted by the bank. The usual practice in Indore was simply to write 'accepted in favour of ... (holder's name).' But a fresh dispute broke out in 1870. Incensed by the bank's deferring of the encashment of Rampertab Kalooram's Rs. 20,000 hundi for two days, the Gyarah Panch, encouraged by the Holkar, forbade its members to do business with the bank unless it accepted in toto the custom that the acceptor of an unpaid hundi would get the full period of grace for 31 days. The Holkar threatened to expel from the town certain errant firms which continued to do business with the bank. The bank sought to bring pressure on the Indore shroffs through their adatis (agents) in Bombay who being situated in British territory were more vulnerable. It also opened a subordinate agency at neighbouring Ujjain in the Sindhia's territory as a move to divert the opium financing business from Indore. Finally in 1873 a compromise was struck, the sub-agency was closed and the Indore agent of the bank, referring apparently to the surrender of the shroffs, wrote with satisfaction: 'Ujjain has served its purpose, and Holkar is now a constituent'. (II, 351-4).

In Baroda, too, the shroffs' mode of 'doing business on the system of the country' suffered a reverse when the princely administration itself, under the direction of the reformer Sir T. Madhava Rao, ended the association of the bankers with the revenue business of the state. It was from this time that the decline of the houses of Samal Behechar, Lallee Mangal and Ratanjee Kahandas dated. But Hari Bakti and Gopal Myral still continued at the centre of a network of banking and hundi transactions spread over many parts of the country beyond Baroda (II, p. 362, n3, n4),

Hyderabad was another leading centre of the Indian banking business. Here the bankers derived wealth and influence not only from handling the finances and revenues of the Nizam,

but also from providing the Hyderabad Resident with cash on the spot (the Resident had no local income to defray his expenditures) in return for supply bills drawn on treasuries in British territory. These bankers, the biggest among them being North Indian firms, had widespread connections in British territory, and, to the chagrin of the Resident, monopolized the business of encashing supply bills, manipulating the exchange rate to their own advantage by 'skilful combinations' (II, 290). The vulnerability of the Resident to their combination was shown up during the Mutiny of 1857, when they combined against the purchase of supply bills from the Residency and starved it of cash. The motive, however, was not antipathy to the British, for few would have suffered more from the sepoys breaking out into mutiny than the Sahukars of Hyderabad. It was simply that they received advices from the principals or agents of their firms in upper India that government bills were no longer negotiable (II, 291-2). The bankers were sufficiently well disposed to respond ultimately to the Resident's appeal and despite the uncertainty they made cash supplies available to overcome the crisis. The Bank of Bengal, which opened a branch in Hyderabad in 1867, cut into the business of encashing supply bills to the Residency and it was the common impression that its larger resources enabled it to gain real control of the rate of exchange between the Hyderabad Hallee Sicca and the British Indian rupee (II, 290-1). The Residency, however, took care to keep alive its 'pecuniary relationship with the Sahukars', so that they might rally round in times of crisis when the bank's ability to meet the Residency demands could be seriously affected (II, 293).

Despite the competition inherent in the Bengal Bank's attempt to gain control of the exchange rates, its dealings were closely interwoven with the business of the Sahukars. The biggest business of the Hyderabad bankers was hundi dealings with Bombay, Calcutta and to a much lesser extent with Madras, Banaras and other towns outside Hyderabad state. The old Bank of Bombay, which had a branch in Hyderabad before its collapse, and afterwards the Bank of Bengal, developed a flourishing business in discounting the Sahukar's hundis. Unlike the British Presidency towns of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, native towns like Hyderabad had not developed a banking business of cash credits on the basis of deposit of government

securities by the borrower ; so discount of hundis, the traditional bankers' business in India, remained the principal component in banking activities here. The old Bank of Bombay discounted hundis worth about 9 lakhs per annum, mainly demand bills on Bombay and Calcutta for 61 days at an interest of 5 per cent per annum (II, 287). The Bank of Bengal continued their business and evolved credit limits to the amount of hundis of each Sahukar constituent it could safely discount. In 1868 Bansilal Abirchand had a credit rating of Rs. 2 lakhs, but actually it was allowed by the Hyderabad agent to borrow beyond this limit, along with other notable bankers of the town who had been put on the list of approved shroffs by the Bank of Bengal (II, 297). In 1871-72 following the collapse of the cotton boom and financial reforms by the Salar Jung which put the Sahukars into difficulty, the house of Mahanundaram Pooranmull, constituent of the Bangal Bank, was in difficulty. So closely was the business of the Sahukars interwoven that the Bank of Bengal reduced the amount of hundis each Sahukar could discount with its Hyderabad Branch (II, 298-9), but within a year the crisis passed, and the complementarity of the relations between the bank and the bigger shroffs was brought into prominence by the eagerness with which Bansilal Abirchand of Nagpur, Gopal Mairal of Baroda and Goculdoss Gopaldoss of Banaras competed for the vacant post of Khazanchee to the bank's Hyderabad branch (II, 302-3).

It was in the cotton tract of Central India, however, that the closest integration was achieved between the banks and the Indian traders and bankers. Here the New Bank of Bombay financed the bills of many principal European firms : Finlay Scott & Company, Finlay Clark & Co., W & A. Graham & Co., W. Nicol & Co., and Ralli Brothers to the extent of Rs 2 lakhs, and Ritchie Steuart & Co., Volkart Brothers and Wallace & Co., to the extent of Rs lakh. But the bank's branches in Amraoti, Khamgaon and other principal centres of the cotton business also supplied cash to approved shroffs against 15 and 30 days' hundis on Bombay at stipulated rates : at Khamgaon Jeevraz Balloo had a credit rating of Rs 2 lakhs in 1869 and three other Indian firms including Goculdas Madhowjee & Co., had a rating of 1 lakh each. In 1876 the bill limit of Goculdas Madhowjee was raised to the unheard of figure of Rs 5 lakhs (II, 354-5).

The complementarity that developed between the business of the Presidency Banks and the business of the Indian shroffs and merchants within the newly drawn framework of the imperial economy in the 1870's was evident even in smaller and far-away centres of business. The best example given by Bagchi is Nagapattinam (Negapatam). When the Bank of Madras opened a branch here in 1868, it found in operation 'a great number of Chetties' who belonged to the Natukottai Chettiar community of Madurai. These bankers maintained business establishments here on account of its regular dealings with Ceylon. The Madras Bank's agent at Negapatam reported: 'They carry on extensive transactions especially with Colombo, have almost unlimited credit with the natives of the place and are as a rule reported very wealthy, some of them enormously so. On the other hand, it is said, should one of them fail, which sometimes happens, though very rarely, there are no assets to be found and if traced to their native villages, their property consists of mud huts only.' We also have it from the agent that the 'wealthy natives of the place' — apparently the same Natukottai Chettiar bankers (the term 'native' here being used in the racial sense rather than the sense of a native of Nagapattinam) — lent largely at high rates on timber imported from Ceylon and Moulmein. The loans stretched for long periods of 6 to 9 months, during which the timber, lying uninsured in an open space, was sold bit by bit with the consent of the lender. The Bank of Madras had to stretch a rule or two to develop its business in Negapatam. Its rules laid down that no loans could be issued on the security of uninsured timber, but since there was no Western insurance company on the spot, it had to forgo the observance of this rule. It was not always the Indian merchants and bankers who had to make the adjustments for the new imperial economy to function smoothly (II, 380-5).

Indian firms and credit ratings

Scattered through the thousand pages of Bagchi's formidable work, we find occasionally informative bits about individual Indian firms and traders which unfortunately are not consolidated into a coherent and integrated picture of the place of the Indian banking and trading firms in the economy of mid-Victorian India. The

materials for drawing such a picture with even a rudimentary quantitative indication of their size and standing, if available anywhere apart from the now largely lost records of the firms themselves (the surviving holdings yet to be worked upon include the records of the Poddars at Churu and the Haribhaktis at Baroda University), must be embedded in the credit ratings and Opinion Books of the Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras.

Thus we have a fleeting glimpse of Lolit Mohun Doss, who appears only once in the narrative—on the occasion of his failure in Calcutta on 10 June 1873, caused by losses in jute shipments at a time when there was a depression in the bazaar and the money market was unusually slack. The credit and standing of this (Bengali ?) merchant was high—for he failed with liabilities between 10 and 15 lakhs of which 4 to 5 lakhs was to the bazaar and the rest to the exchange banks, such as Mercantile, National and Agra. His only hundi current with the Bank of Bengal was retired under rebate by a shroff named Ockoyram Hurrackchand (a Marwari ?), so that the bank suffered no loss from his failure (II, 125).

Another man who appears only once, also upon the occasion of his failure, was Bavachy Coonhee Packey (a Moplah or a Chulia Muslim ?) of Tellicherry: He was a Malabar merchant and coffee contractor with large business at Tellicherry, Cochin and Mangalore, and connections with Aden. His credit was very large, indeed, for when he absconded to Aden in June 1874, his liabilities to various parties—the Tellicherry merchants Aboobucker, bin Fackeera of Mangalore, various Badagara natives, the Oriental Bank Corporation at Tellicherry, etc.—was estimated at the huge figure of 22 lakhs (II, 389-90).

An even wealthier firm which pops up once in the narrative, also on the occasion of rumours that it had run into trouble, was Radhakissen Govindoss. This was a banking firm of Agra with a Calcutta branch known as Luckmechund Radhakissen. Although the firm had been known and was still known as the wealthiest in India, the Bank of Bengal, frightened by rumours that it had transferred its entire property to the Vrindaban temple at Mathura, refused to discount its hundis in Calcutta unless secured by independent names, and called for secret information from the Agent

in Agra in 1873. The Agra agent, replying at length on 25 March 1875, confirmed the high financial standing of the firm. The two partners of the firm had, indeed, built the temple at a cost of Rs. 45 lakhs, and had made over property yielding an annual income of Rs 66,000, but not all assets had been made over. The Agra agent intimated that the firm still had assets worth Rs. 66 lakhs.

It would appear from these figures that some of the Agarwal, Vaish and Khatri banking firms of Agra, Benaras, Delhi and other North Indian towns could still rival, in the 1870's, the thrusting Marwari firms that came to dominate the Indian banking scene till at least the 1930's. Lala Jotee Persaud, another merchant prince of Agra and possibly a Khatri, made his fortune by supplying the army during the first Afghan war and the two Sikh wars. In 1850 he still had outstanding claims on this account worth £ 1,380,000 for which he filed a suit against the government in the Supreme Court, while the magistrate in Agra for his part prosecuted him for charging to the government the price of 'thousands of visionary bullocks, who never ate straw or yielded beef'. The government reached a compromise with him in 1852 and paid him Rs 14 lakhs. He was reckoned to be the 'great commissariat contractor in the North-Western Provinces', and he also figured as a 'Zillah Banker' in C. N. Cooke's account of 1863. During the revolt of 1857 he rendered important service to the British and was rewarded with estates confiscated from the rebels worth over one lakh and a quarter (II, 479, 490 n16).

Of the two Marwari giants that were already prominent in the 1860's and were destined to emerge as the largest hundi bankers before the great depression of the 1930's, Bagchi mentions Tarachand Ghanshyamdas in passing, but gives more information on Bansilal Abirchand. Bagchi describes 'Bunseelall Abeerchand' as 'a branch of the great Poddar firm of Bikaner and Shekhawati' (II, 299). Actually the great Poddars of Ramgarh and Churu in Shekhawati (which belonged to the Jaipur and not the Bikaner state) owned the firm of Tarachand Ghanshyamdas in Calcutta and various other firms in other places, but not the firm of Bansilal Abirchand, which was owned by the Dagas of Bikaner with headquarters in Nagpur. Bansilal Daga's son Abirchand, who is described in the early 1860's

as Abeer Chund Sowcar of Kamptee (an important business centre near Nagpur at that time) figures as a creditor in a couple of insolvency cases in the Madras High Court. We find him prosecuting G. G. K. Richardson and J. S. S. Richardson of Madras in one case (1861) and Captain Francis Applegarth of the Indian army in the other (1863) (II, 76, 78). In a Madras Almanac for 1867 which listed 'Sowcars, Auctioneers and Commission Salesmen' in Secunderabad, we find Bansilal Abirchand figuring as a Hyderabad Sowcar (II, 86 n56). As already mentioned, Bansilal Abirchand figured even before this in a list of 73 Native Bankers of Calcutta given in Thacker's Directory of 1864. Its business in Bombay, which must have arisen by extension from Nagpur and Kamptee, long preceeded this, but finds no mention in Bagchi's narrative as the records of the old Bank are lost. Its standing in the Hyderabad Residency was so high that the Resident was prepared to play it off against the Bank of Bengal to obtain better rates of exchange on supply bills on British treasuries. He referred to the alacrity of this house 'in coming forward at Nagpur to meet the requirements of our Government, when the Mutiny of 1857 was at its height', and mentioned this as a reason for 'furnishing some security for their satisfactory fulfilment of any contract they might undertake with us in circumstances like those under consideration' (II, 293). Khazanchi for the Bank of Bengal at Bombay and Amritsar already, the firm bid for becoming the bank's Khazanchi at Hyderabad also, but withdrew when the bank sought to impose stringent restrictions on its exchange operations between Bombay and Hyderabad as a condition for the appointment (II, 302).

As the records of the State Bank of India are not open to the public, only Professor Bagchi is in a position to say how much more information is available in these records about Indian bankers and merchants. The Banks of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, as already mentioned, maintained lists of approved shroffs and merchants. These lists, which were regularly revised from year to year, mentioned the limit to which each man could discount his hundis with the bank, and beyond which he would not be accommodated. As these lists were kept strictly secret, they do not necessarily indicate the standing and credit of the approved shroffs in the bazaar, but all the same they must provide the only statistical basis for a study of the size

and credit of the Indian banking and trading firms as it varied over the years. Professor Bagchi is the first scholar given access to these top secret lists, and the academic community expects that he will provide in the forthcoming volumes what we do not have yet, i.e., a list of all credit ratings together with the vital information about the standing of the clients in the Opinion Books of the banks.

There is rich fare for scholars in the volumes already published, and historians and economists will look forward eagerly to the completion of the project, and to the opening of the State Bank's archives for all researchers.

BOOK REVIEWS

David Ludden, PEASANT HISTORY IN SOUTH INDIA (Princeton University Press, 1985). Price \$ 45.

The book contributes to the modern literature on Indian history in three distinct ways. Though the title suggests a general historiographical concern for a reasonably broad area of the Indian sub-continent, the volume sets things in a strong regional perspective of a cultural zone roughly co-extensive with the British Indian district of Tinneveli (Tirunelveli). As such, district studies are not all that new in South Indian history, particularly after Professor Frykenberg's pioneer work on Guntur district (1969). What is fascinating in Ludden's study is his emphasis on the cultural ecology of the locality, with its meaningful subdivisions always maintaining their supra-local and wide regional links. Village and region are both important in this account, conceptually contradict each other, finally leading to new questions and a new framework of spatial order. Secondly, the story is told in an unusually long historical perspective, covering the millennium 900 to 1900. Historiographical interest in the *Longue Durée*, both philosophically and methodologically, is a well known Braudelian concern; it had many followers. The interest was echoed, in one way or other, in the South Indian history through the writings of Professor Burton Stein and others for over several decades. For example, Stein's seminal idea of agrarian integration is intelligible only from the viewpoint of the long term. Ludden takes the difficult task of relating the epochal considerations in the regional context, filling up many important gaps in the process. Local history in the long term and *vice versa* become thus more meaningful in Ludden. Thirdly, the theme of Ludden's work is peasant history, or more widely social history defined, explained and elaborated by the four types of social network shaping the peasant's world: kinship, religion, state and market interactions. As each of these networks has its own rules, roles and routines, simultaneously influenced by those of the other, Ludden's peasant history comprises an analysis of diverse elements ranging

from culture, politics and caste to hardcore economic history. The very horizon of agrarian social history is thus widened. However, the novelty of Ludden's approach described above raises certain problems for the book under review. The problems are both historiographical and factual, and they are intelligible only in details. A statement of Ludden's thesis in broad outlines is, therefore, in order.

The book includes six chapters, the first three of which cover epochal developments before 1801 "in chronological sequence" to reconstruct conditions and transformations during medieval, post-medieval and early modern periods. These are primarily based on published inscriptional data, and on their reinterpretation. However, the last three chapters that concentrate on the nineteenth century are based on a considerable range of unpublished official records. Nineteenth century records are often used to supplement major explanations for the earlier periods also.

Ludden traces the agricultural history of Tirunelveli in diverse ecological conditions from the Sangam period onwards (c. 300 BC - AD 300), out of which gradually came a thriving human habitat. It was, however, an essentially dry area in which drainage control technology "was known at the latest by the ninth century" when the Pandya period began. The Pandya-period irrigation, a major advance in technology, rested upon both inundation and small diversion dams, that were probably temporary. Gradually, in the Tambraparni valley in the Tirunelveli region, irrigated communities spread during centuries after 900 and developed its core institution, the *brahmadeya* (or the Brahman-controlled and inhabited villages). In the Pandyan political integration that followed, kingship attained a new meaning : it became the focal point of an elaborate redistributive system for dispersed material and symbolic resources through transactions in ritual gift-giving. Gifts were given to temples and Brahmans, to create the moral basis of authority as well as to establish key political alliances, both by kings and local chiefs. Royal grants to temples were often executed through important local personalities, as in the case of Etti Sattan, a merchant, who received the Pandyan grant for the great temple at Tiruchendur. The bulk of royal official corps also consisted of chiefs with powers rooted in

specific localities. There was competition between kings and chiefs, but more important was their mutual dependence. They together protected and patronized local institutions, put more resources into the hands of dominant landowning groups, and made temples central points in the redistributive system. Interestingly enough, Ludden suggests that flurries of temple building occurred in Tirunelveli during times of political competition, while political stability "seems to have slowed new temple construction" (p. 31). Through temples people forged a great variety of social bonds, as temples became institutional moneylenders, employers, bankers, landlords, consumers, local tax receivers and centres of production and retail enterprise. In addition, temples became the medium of popular religion, through *bhakti* movement, forging further links between kings and localities, as in the case of the Sudikkodutta Nachiyar temple in Srivilliputtur with the gradual deification of the Tamil woman poet-saint Andal and the subsequent support for her temple from the Pandyan kings. It is notable that all temples worked under the close scrutiny of the people who dominated agricultural communities of the many ethnic microregions called *nadus*, through two key institutions — *ur* and *brahmadeya*. Ludden gives credence to the Stein thesis of Vellala-Brahman alliance during the period, as the foundation for the dominant caste status for Brahmans and Vellalas alike in Tirunelveli. An analysis of the Tamil revenue terms during this period definitely points to various obligations to exalted superiors in society — in harvest shares, duties, landownership and watercontrol. The solidarity and superiority of the Vellala farming community that now came into being in Tirunelveli in relation to all other non-Brahmans stemmed from a cultural order achieved through the shared participation of peasants and kings in religious networks with the help of Brahmans only. Thus, roughly from 900 to 1300, the central place in Tirunelveli agrarian order was occupied by gods.

Massive changes in agrarian conditions took place in the Tirunelveli region after 1300 for two and a half centuries, when large-scale migration and frontier peasant settlements transformed much of its social history. Following the Muslim incursion from the north of India and the creation of Vijaynagar in the south, warriors and peasants continued to move further southward in search of land,

adventure and wealth, setting various Tamil groups in motion, in turn. Consequently, Vijaynagar warriors set their power upon the Pandyan political domain, and frontier peasant settlements opened the new parts of the region to agriculture. Henceforward, peasants fought to control stretches of territory in units of extended kinship and localized state solidarity, at the centre of which lay the coercive power of military kings. Tirunelveli peasants, however, lived under no single ruling authority during the Vijaynagar period. There were Vadugas (immigrant Telugus) and Maravas in addition to the old Pandya elites of Vellalas and Brahmans. The Nayaka warriors continued to support temples to establish their authority; more importantly, they took keener interest in temple supervision, management and accounts, with the local landed control over them correspondingly decreasing. The continued rise of the major temple in the town of Tirunelveli — the Nellaiyappa Koil — under the Nayakas is just an example. By contrast, the decline of the local temple of Sudikkodutta Nachiyar at Srivilliputtur for want of royal patronage was remedied by the divine marriage of the patron-goddess Andal to Lord Paramaswami, thus raising her local status: only then did appeal to Saluva Narashimha for generous help become fruitful. The other social group which came into prominence during this time was the Shanars who, as a peculiarly mobile cultivating jati, diversified their occupation in response to new agricultural and commercial opportunities, in addition to their age-old livelihood of tending the palmyra palm. Similarly, the Maravas who migrated into Tirunelveli with increasing regularity after 1300 and set up an agro-military domain included poor agricultural servants selling protection for a fee, really rich protectors of such important institutions as the great Vaishnava temple at Nanguneri and a considerable number of thrifty farmers in the relatively poor agricultural tract of red soil and rainfed tank irrigation in the northern mixed zone. By contrast, the Vadugas comprising Telugu merchants, farmers, priests, artisans and administrators spread throughout, but they concentrated almost exclusively on the black soil tract with secrets of making it productive. Along with these new human settlements and expansion of farming frontiers, there came a technological improvement in the post-medieval irrigation system. It was indicated by the slowly accumulating ability to command massive labour and

capital to support large-scale building projects and slowly improving engineering skills brought together under the warrior management of Nayaka rulers. A new land category (*nanjai-mel-punjai*) developed, and the use of wells became extensive. Ludden claims that with the exception of cotton and perhaps chillies, nineteenth century crop distribution in Tirunelveli "appears to represent a pattern characteristic of the region by the sixteenth century" (p. 56). He, however, makes little effort to substantiate this major claim, but says that coherent agricultural zones developed in Tirunelveli in the process.

The changes that took place in the agrarian order of Tirunelveli from 1550 to 1800 are described in a chapter called 'Tributary State' which became the most important instrument to weave together a regional peasant life through tribute transactions between villages and royal authorities in the area. It was during this time that the state replaced religion as dominant social network in the regional order and agrarian history. It is true that the Nayakas continued to patronize temples and Brahmans as a means of consolidating their control but their realm was much more socially diverse and politically complex than that of their Pandya predecessors in Tirunelveli. First of all, they depended squarely on military men and raised their authority much above its local roots. The Nayaka governors of Tirunelveli, known as Medai Delavoy Mudaliars, distinctly managed two political realms — one in the old Pandya territories through a series of officers and official transactions, and the other in the subregions commanded by Telugu and Marava chiefs through their recognition as *palayakkarans* (popularly known as poligars) or defenders of various fortress towns (*palayams*). Still the Delavoy's position was superior: he used to receive poligars only from a high platform (*medai*). Though tensions were not ruled out, tribute passed from Tirunelveli localities to Tirunelveli town, and to Madurai with some regularity after 1600. By paying tribute, villagers and merchants obtained protection, their leaders attained stature as intermediaries, and finally a complex web of interesting state and market interests developed during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Ludden seems to argue that no remarkable change occurred in tribute transactions during this early modern period, when the Company gradually took over, following the Nayaka decline. Here also his analysis is most generalised and

rather simplistic. However, his descriptions of three major styles of community life that developed by the later days of Nayaka rule, i.e., during this early modern period, is most detailed and fascinating. First of all, in the dry zone, access to land could not be controlled by any single caste and local dominance rested on close control of labour power by means of kinship, caste, patronage and coercion. Ludden suggests that there was no structural correspondence between caste and class here till the beginning of British rule. Similarly, Ludden finds no major structural change in the local order of the wet zone life after the fall of the Pandyas. Here land was not conceived as a clump of earth distinct from the trees, water and the surrounding scrub, or the social relations that made it productive, so much so that the most basic word for land in Tamil, *kani*, also meant a particular measure of land and any hereditary right, whether the land, office or other resources. It is derived from the word "to see", thus involving its holder (known as *kaniyatchikkaran*, or popularly as *mirasidar*) not with labour as such, but with supervision of others' labour only. It was restricted both by symbols of caste status and ritual honour, almost monopolized by the Brahman-Vellala community in the wet zone. By contrast, the social and ritual lowness of the labouring community, the Pallas, is derived from the physical lowness (*pallam*) of fields and channels in which they worked. Ludden seems to believe in the undifferentiated nature of landowning and labouring community internally in this early modern period. He only speaks of a two-fold stratification in social milieu: "one owned land but did not labour; the other laboured without owning even, in many cases, rights to its own labour power" (p. 93). Such an analysis is partly simplistic, as it cannot properly fit the well-known episode of a Palla who gained social status, and became a headman and a hero in the seventeenth century Tamil folk drama, *Mukkudal Pallu*. The author's statement that "mirasidars were the government in the wet zone" (p. 90) also remains largely unqualified. By contrast, he is more specific, though brief, about the mixed zone where the Maravas, Telugus and Shanars settled in greater number and the mirasi stature remained much less secure, even in early modern period. "The fact that nineteenth century records show no surviving custom of swamibhogam payments from Marava farmers to mirasidars may indicate either that Marava

poligars never recognized mirasidar claims or that the custom went into disuse during political disruption after 1740" (p. 96). Indeed, henceforward more local Mārava chiefs began acting like poligars.

Ludden covers the nineteenth century Tirunelveli in various social aspects in three remaining chapters in his book. It is important to note that the nineteenth century is most crucial in his analogy, both for the restrictions imposed by his data as well as for his theme that purports to explain "social change during the nineteenth century" (p. 11) in the context of the preceding peasant millennium. He first analyses the village activity within the colonial state in a chapter called "Anglo-Indian Empire". The new political regime of the East India Company was established on the networks of the state power and authority that had been already functioning. The networks, however, were adjusted according to the needs of the new regime, while its major actors - both Englishmen and Indians — adjusted their own expectations and goals in a constant process of negotiation. The ideology and language of the new regime only systematized the social relations amongst powerholders within the state authority. The profound economic and imperial expansion that took place in the nineteenth century, particularly during the period 1840 to 1880, is a corollary of all these through state and peasant initiatives in the village. This process of change was evident in many spheres in the revenue system, in the new technology, in the developing imperial framework. Ludden argues that the stability of the ryotwari system depended on the inclusion of the existing local, subregional and regional men of wealth and authority in the Company regime. The ryot worked differently in the wet and dry zones of Tinneveli. He also worked differently from Munro's prescribed system, particularly in the dry zone villages, where best soils were left fallow as "a good ploy for reducing tax demand" (p. 109). Too much was left to the *carnams* or village accountants. Similarly, in the irrigated villages of the wet areas, the English met an implacable hostility from landowners in their effort to collect fixed money taxes, inflexible despite fluctuating yields and prices. Ludden's study of the price movement in Tirunelveli seems rather perfunctory ; it is supplemented by a single graph of paddy prices. The full effects of the falling prices in the 1830s and 1840s on the peasant activity at large are largely ignored. From the 1840s

onwards, another major change is noticeable in the government's irrigation investment under the influence of Sir Arthur Cotton, but "its inspiration might well have derived from mirasidar efforts" (p. 114). From the 1840s onwards, again, the Board of Revenue ordered the Tirunelveli collectors to end all concessionary tax rates, including the ones for *nanjai-mel-punjai*. A remarkable change also took place in the concept of waste in the following decades. However, despite these changes and modernization in the networks of rural administration, the substance of local power relations continued. Ludden thus emphasizes the element of continuity in the imperial framework.

A traditionally active region of peasant and merchant enterprise, Tirunelveli rapidly became even more active during the nineteenth century, with important social and economic consequences. Commodity production, particularly cultivation of cotton for export, became the central feature of this new development. Ludden seems to argue that the rapid expansion of agricultural commodity production was a natural development of long-term trends in the peasant social history. A regional trade system had already grown in Tirunelveli from the founding of the Nayaka dynasty to 1800, and towns along major routes of transport and diverse peasant communities had already been integrated within it. Yet there were many serious obstacles to commercial expansion and circuits of commodity exchange, and they increased after the completion of the eighteenth century wars. Hence the new concern for the improvement of roads and bridges in the nineteenth century. Roadwork considerably lowered transport costs, even before the building of the Railways in the 1870s. The growth of cotton from a traditional crop for trade to a major export crop was well-established in the district before the middle of the nineteenth century. "The cash value of cotton exports rose eightfold during the half century after 1830 from less than eight to more than sixty-four lakh rupees annually" (p. 139). There was a further swing towards the growth of cotton towns in the north of the district which became large-scale consumers of rice from the wet zone. Here farmers had more cash to invest in land also. According to Ludden, the most favourable period of investment in Tirunelveli was between 1835 and 1875, despite occasional hazards. Probably 1835 was too early a date for such a change. Particularly,

there were repeated allegations from Tirunelveli collectors in the 1840s about high tax rates discouraging farmers from digging wells. Yet there is no denying the fact that state outlays were increased in irrigation projects like the Srivaikuntam dam (completed in 1874), but repair work was mostly done by interested local parties "who themselves donated assets to the project and who also reaped much of the benefit" (p. 142). Ludden, however, notes that the colonial government grossly neglected tank irrigation in Tirunelveli: "small and scattered drainage irrigation works never received government funding in proportion to their significance in agriculture" (p. 145). He, however, misses the point that the quick profit-oriented projects of government partly explain its over-concern for valleys and lack of concern for other areas. In short, of the various ecological zones in Tirunelveli, the one most to benefit from the improving economic conditions was the dry zone, where wealth to be reaped from military action declined in relation to that from market activity. The changing function of the zamindar of Ettaiyapuram and his prosperity as a result provided an important example. Here new transport technology transformed small, defensive commercial towns into expanding centres of cotton trade. The mixed zone also benefited as a whole, and here the economic winners were the Shanars in contrast to the Marava population which was in economic doldrums. Particularly, droughts and famines hit this mixed zone very hard. As regards the irrigated zone, considerable benefit accrued through improved investment of mirasidars and stability of output, but "producing with Tambraparni waters became increasingly costly and difficult toward the century's end" (p. 158). Thus the rise of commodity production in the Tirunelveli region created diverse tensions and variations in the social relations throughout.

In the last chapter called 'Changing Tradition', Ludden deals with the subtle shifts in social power as manifested in conflicts and their resolution amongst groups in nineteenth century Tirunelveli. The major arena of the conflict concerned the principles of property right in rural Tirunelveli, traditionally expressed through two terms *pangu* (share) and *pattam* (entitlement). In the dry areas, regular payments to the medieval Pandya kings had already solidified claims to property according to the *pattam* principle within local circuits of the dominant caste authority, and in the wet zone,

an institutionalized structure of shareholding had already embraced whole irrigated communities comprising Brahmans and Vellalas, and Pallas and Pariahs in relations to their various claims over land, harvest and labour services. British records provide ample evidence of the mirasidar-peasant conflict that developed over the vexed issue of the payment of *swamibhogam* fees to the mirasidar in the mixed zone, and one of Ludden's major contributions is to relate this to the various movements of Palla, Marava and Shanar communities. He also elaborates the conflicts between the new legal framework of the ryotwari system and the age-old custom in this context, which were often reflected in the contradiction between revenue and judicial decisions, but virtually resolved in their concurrence with the new definition of property rights. Ludden's insistence that this process of change is traceable only from the 1840s is probably due to his dependence on court cases on the issue of waste land; the conflict is probably older. In the wet zone proper, Ludden finds little conflict. This failure to identify and analyse social conflicts in a highly differentiated agrarian order of the wet zone probably stems from the fact that many of them were submerged, never coming before the court; they were also ignored because the mirasidar group is taken here as a monolithic whole without its internal classification. Ludden is, however, right in suggesting that the worst social conflict took place in the northern mixed zone of Tirunelveli, where the relatively weak mirasidars were placed against the socially and economically stronger peasants. The changing social milieu as a result of these conflicts had also its urban ramification, where the Shanars, whose fortunes were rising, clashed with mirasidars and Maravas, then undergoing reverses of fortunes, on a vexed pollution issue on the streets around the noted Nellaiyappa temple in Tirunelveli town in 1858. The finale of the episode shows a major redefinition of custom as such: state policy, community movements and even social riots were involved in it. Thus, Ludden argues, the social conflicts both in villages and towns established cultural terms, strategies and poles of opposition for modern politics in Tirunelveli, connecting it with the Madras Presidency politics and platforms in the twentieth century.

Ludden's concern for long periods of history of a limited region in diverse possible ways makes his study fascinating. Indeed, in the

handling of local historical details and their relations, Ludden always excels. One major conclusion of his book is that the most dramatic change in peasant decision-making in Tirunelveli occurred only gradually, but finally altering the Tamil landscape and Tamil culture of the region alike. He makes an admirable effort to trace such changes. May be his concentration on the nineteenth century has partly given a bias to his analysis ; may be, his interpretation of imperialism and capitalism in its local, regional and international forms often leads him to explanations which are not invariably supported by the empirical data presented in this otherwise well-researched book. Some of his views are also quite close to the much-maligned Cambridge thesis. The present reviewer, however, thinks that these supposedly general conclusions of Ludden's book are not necessary even for a critical appreciation of it : his local history can stand on its own feet without his general introduction and general conclusion. His most remarkable achievement is precisely this : placing the purely local history in a highly significant long-term canvas in the widest social context.

ARUN BANDOPADHYAY

K. S. Singh, TRIBAL SOCIETY IN INDIA : AN ANTHROPO - HISTORICAL PRESPECTIVE (Manohar, New Delhi 1985)

The book, mostly based on the author's earlier publications, has an amazingly vast scope. The process of transformation of the tribal society in India, which forms its central theme, has been traced over a long period of time. The story covers a considerable part of medieval Indian history, and has been brought down to the year nineteen eighty-five. Though the author's emphasis is on middle India, he equally confidently analyses the tribal societies in other parts of India. The wide spectrum of the changes in the tribal world included in this study has seldom been covered before in one monograph.

Some repetitions are perhaps unavoidable in a collection of papers written over a considerable length of time. However, readers would not miss the central argument and the line of reasoning.



The author's point of departure is his disagreement with two prevalent assumptions about the tribal society in India. They are as follows : (1) This society was a segmentary and relatively static one before British rule ; an arcadian simplicity marked the tribal life-style, and the increasing hinduization of the tribal chiefs and the 'vulnerability of the tribal character' gradually undermined this blissful state of things. (2) The tribal system was subsumable under the Hindu social order, since the wider cultural and economic systems of the Hindus had been steadily 'absorbing' the tribals. This process of the 'Hindu absorption of the tribals', according to the proponents of this view, seldom necessitated complete effacement of the tribal identity. The 'absorption' was compatible with the persistence of a considerable degree of tribal autonomy.

The pre-British tribal society, Dr. Singh contends, was far from static, and experienced significant changes. One of Dr. Singh's crucial arguments is that the changes were mostly predicated upon continual contacts with the wider Indian civilization. The process of state formation in some tribal societies was an instance. One of the preconditions for the viability of the state mechanism was the availability of a considerable rural surplus generated by settled agriculture. The agricultural technology that made this settled agriculture possible was mostly borrowed from the Hindu peasant castes. The spread of Brahminical influence over the small ruling class elite in the new state contributed to its stability. This elite group used this influence towards legitimizing its new political authority.

In fact the tribal society and the Hindu society had been exposed to more or less similar historical processes. How to characterise the continual Hindu-tribe contacts ? Anthropologists, such as Professor Bose, have propounded the notion of 'Hindu absorption' of the tribe by way of such a characterisation. The Hindu material and cultural modes increasingly penetrated tribal societies. The tribal system, they argue, thus became a sub-system of the dominant Hindu social system, with the tribals accepting the value system of the Hindus. Bose did point to the integration of the tribes into the wider regional economic system. But, on the whole, he tended to interpret the tribal absorption in Hindu society more or less in

cultural terms. The emphasis of Professor Srinivas is still more pronouncedly cultural.

Singh disagrees with the emphasis on the cultural component of the 'Hindu absorption'. He examines in this connection a view attributing to Brahminical settlements the diffusion of the advanced agricultural technology that facilitated the transition from the semi-nomadic and semi-pastoral tribal economy to settled agriculture. The available anthropological evidence, Singh points out, does not support the view. He explains the process differently. He thinks the crucial role in the tribal emulation of the new technology was that of immigrant peasants. The new tribal states themselves encouraged this peasant immigration, because of the superior skill of the guest cultivators. Artisan communities too had an important role in this technology transfer. An essentially economic process has thus been called 'Hindu absorption'. What is particularly Hindu about the process? Other modes of integration of tribes into the wider regional system were also predominantly secular in nature. The spread of the market system only cemented these tribe-peasant ties and the links with the regional economy. This was one of the reasons why the economic absorption did take place even when the tribes remained out of the Hindu cultural system.

Dr. Singh is critical of the idea of 'Hindu absorption' also on the ground that the view regards the Hindu-tribe culture contact mostly as a unilinear process, i.e. flow of cultural influence from the materially and culturally superior Hindus to tribes, and ignores the 'countervailing process' of tribalization of the neighbouring peasant communities, particularly where the tribes constituted the dominant communities. The immigrant peasant communities here increasingly came under the influence of tribal mores, rituals and beliefs. In fact the tribes here had also a role to play in state formation, to the extent that they were involved in coronation ceremonies and in some places managed and controlled rituals at temples.

The institutional and economic changes during British rule widened and strengthened, to an unprecedented extent, the links of tribes with the regional economic and cultural systems. The comparative isolation of the tribals nearly broke down, despite the occasional attempts on the part of the Government to erect a sanitary cordon

to prevent the contagion from exogenous influences. Two crucial factors in linking the tribals with the wider civilization were the emergence and growth of commodity and credit markets, and the imposition of a land system utterly unsuitable to the tribal agrarian society. The new private property structure of landholding was completely alien to the tribal social organization and the internal distribution of powers in the tribal society. Alien interests, antagonistic to tribal interests, consolidated themselves over the years.

The recurring revolts of the tribals point to the abruptness of the changes they had been thus experiencing, changes often amounting to a disruption of their society and economy.

Dr. Singh identifies three phases of the revolts. The first phase (1795-1860) he calls 'primary resistance', a concept he does not precisely define. He notes some of the dominant features of the revolts of this phase : participation of groups other than tribes ; leadership of the 'traditional chiefs and their subordinates who had been dispossessed of their property', and spontaneity of the revolts against the 'new system', and 'the new classes of people who were inducted by it'. The second phase of the revolts, occurring in the context of the worsening material existence of the tribes, were more 'complex' in nature. We come across here 'a curious mix of agrarian, religious and political issues'. The leadership was mostly non-traditional. It came from the 'ranks of the peasants, educated tribals or was offered by those outsiders who had gained a footing among the tribes'. The third phase (1920-1947) 'saw the rise of the movement of a secular and political nature'. Its distinctive features were the involvement of tribals in the nationalist movement, their enthusiastic response to Gandhi's message, and the emergence later of a regionally-oriented separatist movement (Jharkhand).

(2)

The grand sweep of the study is one of its strong points. However, the stretch of the sweep is *sometimes* too vast for the study to be satisfying. We wish the author could develop some of his impressive insights. We take as instances his theme of technology transfer and his criticism of the point of view seeking to interpret tribe-caste interaction purely in cultural terms.

The question of technology transfer is normally far more complex than the study seems to assume. Several aspects of the question are rather inadequately treated. What did the new technology actually consist in? What was the technology of tribal agriculture prior to the transfer? Only a bare mention of the swidden cultivation having a limited carrying capacity is not perhaps enough. Agricultural growth in many parts of India often resulted from an increase in the exploited area rather than from intensification of the cultivation process. What exactly happened in the tribal regions? Did the borrowed technology contribute to the growth there? Presumably conditions so vastly differed from place to place that emphasis on the role of the transferred technology alone could sometimes be misleading.

The scale of peasant immigration often determined the extent of effectiveness of the new knowledge about modes of agriculture. The illustrations that Singh provides, at least in regard to middle India, do not suggest any large-scale peasant immigration. The introduction of the technology of wet cultivation in Assam provides a contrast. There it was not just knowledge that was being transmitted. A big community of cultivators familiar with the new technology actually settled there, and their success in consolidating their position depended on a reorganization of cultivation on the basis of the technology, since this ensured the generation of a much larger agricultural surplus than before. The rapid spread of jute cultivation in lower Assam in the first four decades of the 20th century, despite the fact that the jute market was not always favourable to this agricultural enterprise, was also connected with the large-scale immigration of skilled peasant labour from the neighbouring districts of Rangpur and Mymensingh. The success of the Santals against the Paharias and the fast growth of their cultivation in the erstwhile Paharia region similarly resulted from the increasing replacement by the skilled immigrant Santals of the Paharias inefficiently cultivating their lands for long.

Assuming the smallness of the scale of peasant immigration in middle India, how was the borrowed technology diffused? Where no direct role of peasant settlements could be traced how did the tribals come to learn it? This is a relevant query, since just

familiarity with a new technology did not ensure its application. We cite again the case of the Paharias. Despite their familiarity with the Santal mode of cultivation they did not ever show any keenness on practising this mode, continued for long the normally wasteful method of slash and burn, and consequently failed to cope with the advancing Santals, and were ever on the retreat.

Dr. Singh has rightly rejected the bias in favour of interpreting the tribe-Hindu interaction primarily in cultural terms. However, the absorption of tribals in the Hindu social order was not wholly of an economic nature. The tribals did show at times a keenness in emulating some cultural and ethical traits of the Hindus. Some of Dr. Singh's ideas in regard to this may be developed.

Two distinct levels and phases of this emulation may be identified. Where states had been formed with kings exercising the central authority, the royal families and their dependents were the first to emulate the Brahminical norms. As noted above, the motive here was the political one of legitimizing their authority. The 'hinduization' process remained for long confined to this small ruling class elite. In Chotanagpur, for instance, the Mundas were averse to accepting the new culture of the royal family. In fact the cultural gap widened with very many of the alien Brahmin dependents of the royal family increasingly intruding on the traditional Munda position in the land.

The emulation of Hindu ideals by the Mundas, as also by the Santals and the Oraons, had two distinct phases. Initially, only a few individuals in some particular localities came to imbibe Hindu influence. Long contacts with the neighbouring Hindu communities, often low-caste 'service groups', without whom the tribals could not do, led to an almost imperceptible acculturation process. This was unconnected with the collective needs of the tribe. The second phase was marked by purposeful collective efforts oriented to the moral regeneration of the tribals. Even where some of the elements of the first phase continued, their content considerably changed. The transformation of the earlier Bhagat tradition among the Oraons during the first two decades of the 20th century may be cited as an instance. Unlike before, the Bhagat creeds now formed an indispensable ideological component of their new protest movement.

Since emulation of Hindu ideas was a conscious process, it was also a selective one. Not all aspects of Hindu ideas were blindly followed. The tribals, for instance, did not accept the hierarchical Hindu caste system. The moral regeneration movement hardly ever aimed at securing any higher ritual status in the Hindu caste system. Tribals seldom lost any of their own cultural and ethnic identity. In fact the religious revitalization movement among them reinforced this identity. This phase of the acculturation process was not, strictly speaking, part of any sanskritization (hinduization) process.

More than half of the book deals with the changes in the tribal regions during British rule, particularly the recurring tribal revolts. Some of the related questions could be examined.

The cruciality of the role of the British land system (and of related institutions) in these changes is undeniable. However, it is remarkable that a more or less similar system differently affected the tribal regions. It would be worthwhile enquiring if the pre-British agrarian social structure caused the difference. The way the British system came to affect the tribal world was to a considerable extent determined by the pre-existing rural power relations. In the Munda country, for instance, aliens, all connected with the royal family or with its apparatus of political and military control, had already constituted a sizeable number, not just living off the rural surplus indirectly, but directly controlling a considerable part of the traditional Munda lands. British rule reinforced the process. Fresh intruders could easily exploit this vulnerable element in the composition of the Munda society. On the other hand, such a group of aliens rarely existed in several areas of Santal settlements, including the largest one, the Damin-i-Koh. The class emerged later, so that the British land system differently affected the Santals there.

Dr. Singh's elaborate study of the tribal protest movements suggests a number of questions which are worth reconsideration.

Singh's periodization is acceptable, but some of his characterizations of the revolts and some of his criteria for distinguishing between the different phases of revolts are perhaps not. What actually marked off the revolts of the first phase from those of the

second? Dr. Singh does point to the complex elements in the former, but still prefers to call them 'primary resistance'. The meaning of this concept has to be considerably modified if we intend to apply it to these revolts. The concept, systematically developed in connection with the first phase of the revolts in colonial Africa, was normally associated with the first determined assaults by the new colonial authority on the political independence of the various local chiefs. Primary resistance aimed at frustrating such inroads. The resistance might have had other elements, but its distinguishing mark was this distinctively political orientation. Judged by this criterion, only a few of the revolts of the first phase could be called primary resistance. In several typical cases in middle India, i.e., in the Santal, Munda and Oraon regions, the tribals had already been integrated into the new political authority. Characterizing at least their revolts as 'baronial resistance', resistance by the 'tribal aristocracy' seems untenable. In some cases big tribal chiefs did provide the leadership to rebels (for instance, the Bhumij revolt of 1832-33). However, a pertinent query is whether the leadership component alone could justify the characterization of the revolt as 'baronial resistance'. Such a revolt was often actually a combination of several concentric circles of revolts. Links between the different layers and circles were often tenuous, and the different groups were not motivated by similar considerations. In fact the strength of such a revolt derived from the concomitant insurgencies of groups other than tribal chiefs, whom British rule had affected primarily economically. Of course we need to explain how 'baronial resistance' sparked off characteristically sub-altern revolts.

If we combine this criterion of primary resistance with other traits, as Dr. Singh has enumerated them, the distinction between the revolts of the first and the second phases gets blurred. Some of the elements of the first did reappear in the second phase (such as 'resistance to the new system and to the new classes of people inducted by it ... the new landlords, moneylenders and government officials').

Some of the traits associated by Singh with the second phase of the revolts have been firmly established by recent researches (such as the emergence of religious revitalization movements, non-traditional

leadership and role of leaders claiming divine inspiration and sanction). One trait singled out by Singh as a distinguishing mark of such revolts has yet to be empirically established. Singh calls it 'the beginning of a peasant culture among the tribes, based on the concept of individual proprietorship, and led by peasant leaders, particularly in eastern India'. We wish Singh could elaborate the theme. As one of the developments leading to 'the rise of peasant culture' he has noted the gradual breakdown of the tribal agrarian system. It remains an open question whether the disruption of the traditional tribal agrarian system produced a 'peasant culture'. Non-recognition by the new law of the tribal village community and the increasing number of land transfers tended mainly to create a class of intermediaries, mostly aliens, at the cost of the tribals, and had not much to do with any transition from tribal agriculture to 'peasant culture'. Tribal cultivation, after the completion of the initial reclamation process, was seldom collectively organized. Land was distributed among individual tribal families, which cultivated their holdings on their own, subject of course to the usual communal rules. The intrusion of alien intermediaries and the resultant alteration of power relations in the tribal village only undermined this agricultural organization. The land transfers seldom benefited the tribals themselves, since the alienated lands did not circulate among them. This only increased the powers of unproductive intermediaries. 'The rise of a peasant culture' as a description of a qualitative change in the tribal society is a category yet to be established.

One of the least understood aspects of tribal revolts is the ideological foundation of the religious revitalization movements among tribals, identified by Singh and others as a distinctive trend in the second phase of the revolts. Revitalization movements were hardly ever just a retreat into political inactivity. Tribals regarded the revitalization as an essential means of coping more effectively with their powerful adversaries.

The influence of Christianity explains some elements of tribal millenarianism, but contributed little to the revitalization movement. It was Hindu influence which was crucial. How did the tribals come to know of Hindu creeds, beliefs and rituals? Dr. Singh thinks : 'the peasants spread the rudimentary notions of Hinduism

among tribes such as Mundas, Santals and Bhils who have long been in symbiosis with them'. At least in the case of the Oraons the notions that went into the making of their religious revitalization movement were far from rudimentary. The Bhagat tradition was built on evidently sophisticated notions. It is highly likely that the tribal contacts with itinerant Vaishnava preachers belonging to low Hindu castes, had much to do with the diffusion of Hindu ideas and rituals of purity and of the ideas of monotheism.

Before we turn to the third phase of the tribal revolts we intend to make a few comments on Singh's observations on the origins of the first Santal revolt (1855-56) and on the nature of the organization of the first phase of the revolts. 'The Santal uprising', Singh concludes, 'began paradoxically in a relatively happy economic situation. The Santals had settled down as peasants in their homeland, the Damin-i-Koh, where they were more prosperous than their kinsmen elsewhere. Employment at the indigo factories and in the construction of railways brought in ready cash which filled the Santal's girdles with coins and their women were bedecked with silver jewellery. What turned this happy homeland into a storm centre was the sense of humiliation that the Santals ... suffered when they saw themselves exploited economically by moneylenders and also socially'. This reads almost like an official apologia. We need to explain why despite their assumed affluence the Santals could not do without moneylenders, and why during the insurgency their fury was turned against their alleged benefactors — indigo factories and new railways.

Dr. Singh repeatedly describes the early revolts as being 'elemental, spontaneous'. At least the first Santal revolt was not the sudden outburst of a blind fury. The Santal leaders had deliberated for about three months before they decided to rebel. They expected, till the very last moment, that their enemies would respond to their appeals asking them to mend their ways. Dr. Singh describes the violence of the Kols (1831-32) as 'an orgy of slaughter, an outburst of primordial savagery'. What does 'primordial savagery' really mean?

The nationalist movement of the time did considerably influence the revolts of the third phase. However, taking 1920 (or the Non-Cooperation movement) as the great divide between two phases of

tribal revolts seems to be overstretching an argument. The alleged distinction between the pre-1920 and the post-1920 revolts in terms of organization does not perhaps hold good. The pre-1920 revolts were by no means 'sporadic, isolated and spontaneous'. Equally questionable is the view that the post-1920 phase of tribal politics 'was marked by movements which could be sustained only by organization and through external stimuli. The latter were provided by the nationalist politics which came to the tribal world in the 1920s through the message and personality of Mahatma Gandhi.' Contacts with the nationalist movement could not provide any new organization for rebel tribals. Some local Congressmen only occasionally came into contact with the tribals, particularly in Bihar. The Provincial Congress was normally cool towards any agrarian movement, tribal or peasant.

A new kind of political organization appeared with the rise and growth of the separatist movement in Chotanagpur (Jharkhand). However, this constituted a sharp break from the established trends in the tribal movements in the region. They now nearly ceased to be ethnic in orientation. Ethnicity shaded off into regionalism. The characteristically tribal issues tended to recede into the background. Agrarian radicalism as a mode of tribal protest largely disappeared. The distinctively tribal revolt only occasionally reappeared, in some small pockets.

B. B. CHAUDHURI

Atiur Rahman, *PEASANTS AND CLASSES: A STUDY IN DIFFERENTIATION IN BANGLADESH* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986), pp. XLVI + 295 ; Price Rs. 140.

The study, based on the author's survey (1980 - 81 and 1985) of two villages in Bangladesh, seeks to explain the increasing economic inequality among the peasant families there (roughly during the period 1951 - 1981). The phenomenon of peasant differentiation elsewhere has been variously explained. Dr. Rahman examines in this connection mainly two sharply contrasting viewpoints, 'demographic differentiation' and 'social differentiation', both relating to the Russian

peasant society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first, propounded by Russian populists and neo-populists, particularly Chayanov (whose version has been considerably refined by T. Shanin in *The Awkward Class : Political Sociology of Peasantry in a Developing Society, Russia 1910 - 25*) denied the appearance of any firm trend towards differentiation. Inequalities among the peasantry, it has been argued, were mostly due to varying sizes of peasant families. Family size usually determined family farm size, so that the farm size would increase with the increased family size, and vice versa. The changes in the family size rarely constituted a secular trend, and had generally little to do with the usual behaviour of the economy. Economic inequalities arising out of variations in the family size did not, therefore, lead to any irreversible process of peasant differentiation. Shanin's notion of 'cyclical mobility' points to this element of reversibility in the changes in peasant fortunes with the increase or decrease in the family size. In sum, the demographic interpretation tended to regard the Russian peasantry as a more or less homogeneous class. The second interpretation, while not wholly ignoring the demographic factor in the process of peasant differentiation, regarded the latter essentially as the product of a distinct historical process. Lenin and the later 'agrarian-marxists' traced the process to a wider historical phenomenon : development of capitalism in Russian agriculture, which gradually undermined the foundation of the Russian peasant society. Since development of capitalism was not an accidental happening, originating only in certain regions due to exceptional circumstances, but a secular trend generated by a complex set of historical conditions, the process of peasant differentiation associated with it was bound to crystallize into the emergence of discrete class relations.

Dr. Rahman's study significantly contributes to the debate. (His review of the long debate on the nature of stratification of the Russian peasantry is a model of lucid writing.) His findings do not bear out the demographic interpretation. Cultivation of very many family farms did necessitate employment of wage labour on a considerable scale, which Chayanov's assumptions would preclude. He did not notice any consistent correlation between the family size and the farm size. His data do not corroborate either Shanin's notion of cyclical mobility. The rich families of his sample villages

had been rich for long. The increasing concentration of land in a few families had also been a trend for long and, indeed, its pace had quickened in the recent years. This contradicts Shanin's notion of reversibility of the fluctuating fortunes of peasant families. In fact other means of production too tended to be concentrated in the few families which controlled land, the most vital means in the context of its chronic scarcity. As a result, inequalities between the affluent and the poor were not narrowing or disappearing, as Chayanov or Shanin assumed, but, on the contrary, becoming pronounced. Far more crucial in the process of peasant differentiation was the role of the relations of production in agriculture. Affluent peasants usually employed marginal farmers as agricultural labourers, leased out lands to them and also provided to them a considerable amount of the required credit. Necessarily, they gained most from the usual distress sales of needy farmers' lands.

The easier availability of some basic inputs in post-Independence Bangladesh contributed to the consolidation of such diverse forms of control by affluent peasants. The peasantry as a whole did benefit by the enlarged State investment in agriculture. However, two things stand out from Rahman's findings. First, the superior economic position of the affluent group enabled it to make the most of the inputs provided by the State. Secondly, Dr. Rahman found evidence of patronage by Government, out of political considerations, of some groups of affluent peasants. The ruling elite had to rely on powerful local groups as political allies, and found them in the affluent peasantry. However, as Dr. Rahman also found, appropriation by well-to-do peasants of most of the benefits of the investment by the State, only partly resulted from this conscious policy of State patronage. Substantial peasants could often manipulate the local official bureaucracy to divert to them the largest share of the State-provided inputs.

Some of these conclusions are not perhaps altogether novel. However, the strength of Dr. Rahman's study lies in its sound statistical base. The carefully designed field work elicited data relating to specific questions, so that the author could confidently characterize the changes occurring during the period under review, 1951-1981.

It would perhaps be relevant to compare the conclusions of this study with those of an earlier study on the nature of peasant mobility in Bangladesh (Willem van Schendel, *Peasant Mobility: The Odds of life in Rural Bangladesh*, Manohar Edition, New Delhi, 1982). This study, based on the author's survey of some Bangladesh villages, also tests the applicability of Shanin's criteria of mobility.

Rahman attributes to Schendel the characterization of the changes in the Bangladesh peasant society as 'quasi-equilibrium', even 'peasantization', and concludes that Schendel ignores 'the process of disintegration which is constantly in operation among the peasantry ... It is not peasantization but depeasantization which has been going on, and the pace of it has accelerated in the recent years' (p. 91).

The sense in which Schendel uses the concept 'peasantization' is different from that which Rahman attributes to him. Schendel believes: 'colonial rule turned it [Bangladesh] from a fairly diversified society into a typical peasant society, and it has remained so ever since ... peasantization of rural Bangladesh can be observed throughout colonial rule and it is still going on' (p. 287). Schendel's meaning is clear: the importance of the non-agrarian sector of the economy has diminished to such an extent that the earlier 'diversified society' had shrunk into a mere 'peasant society'.

In fact Schendel does write of the continuing process of peasant differentiation. 'The overall process was one of downward aggregate shifting of the peasantry as a whole, increasing differentiation of peasant households ...' (p. 287). However, he concludes: 'so much mobility did not lead to any basic structural change in the peasantry as a whole over a great number of years In rural Bangladesh there is no question of a major trend towards polarization into a class of capitalist farmers and one of wage labourers. An increasingly crushed peasantry is producing a growing proportion of landless labourers, but well-to-do peasants may not be described as rural capitalists' (p. 288).

B. B. CHAUDHURI

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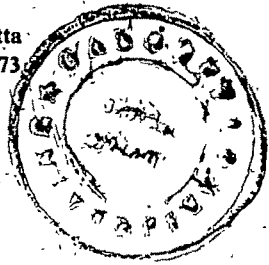
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